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BOOKS by WALDO FRANK

The Unwelcome Man

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Our America

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RAHAB

By

WALDO FRANK



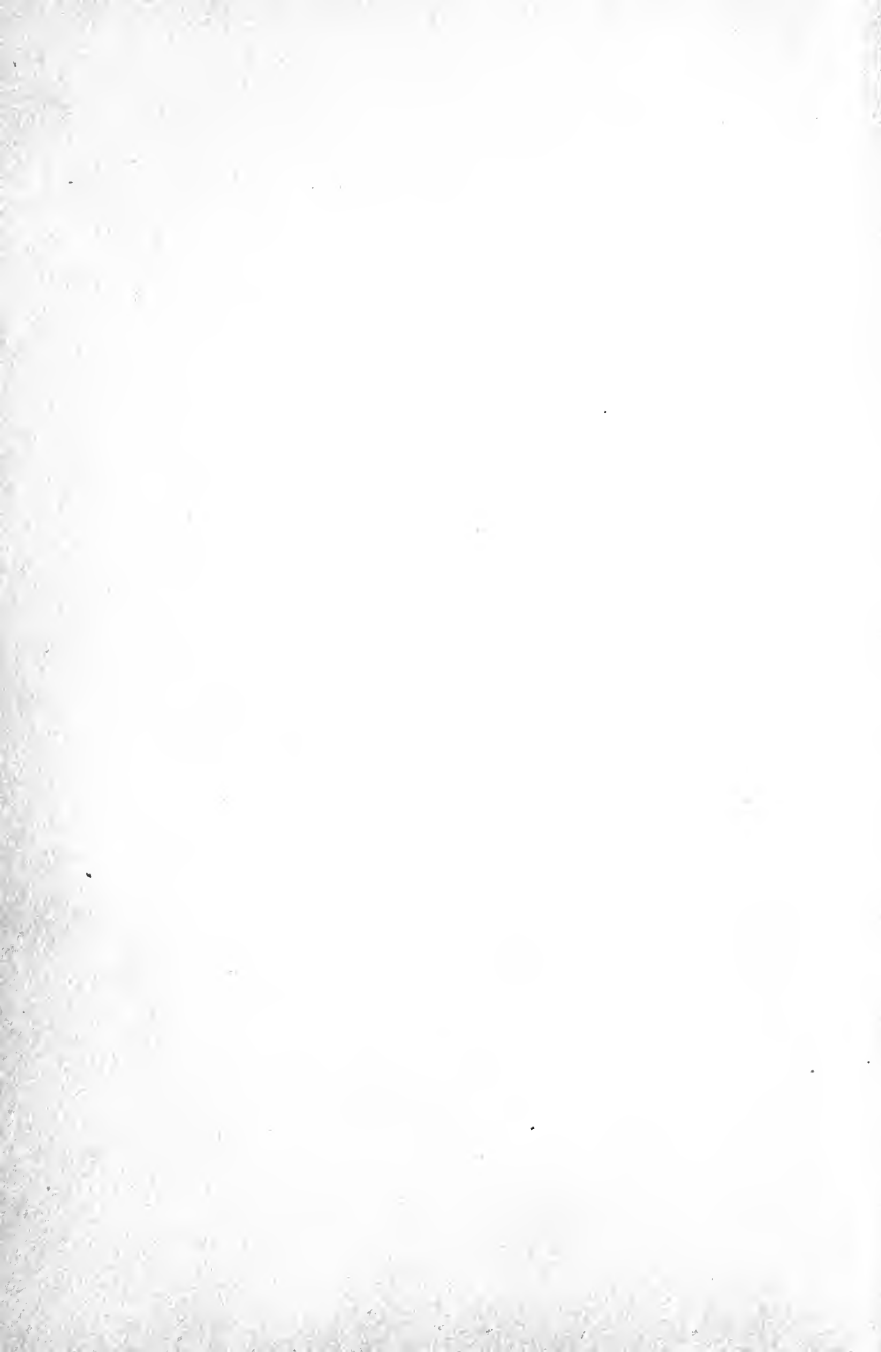
BONI AND LIVERIGHT
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

RAHAB

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To
Magic



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*"Be consoled: thou wouldst not seek
me if thou hadst not found me . . ."*

PASCAL

ONE
BRASS GAS CHANDELIER

THE door opened against the drawn chain, grating against it.

In the grey strip a woman's face, very grey, very unexpectant, suddenly was bright.

It measured a man, young, standing at ease. The chain clicked free. "O it's you, Mr. Samson." The door opened wide, shut them in.

The hall was a long shadow beyond the glow of them standing. He was quiet waiting, not sheer against her: his shaggy coat poured the street's coldness. She was a dim thing about eyes.

"I'm so glad it's you, Mr. Samson."

She walked noiseless through shadow, she took no space from it, she was infinitesimal within a mood. He followed.

"I was taking it right easy . . . reading."

In the gaslight she turned and fronted him. She took his coat. He was a fair boy, gentle, somewhat plump. He sat down, she stood.

—I have been in this room before, I have seen this woman before. It is not the sort of room, she is not the sort of woman I want to see for I am here for neither. . . . Why strangely now this sense of her reality upon me?

It was her room, there they were after all, the woman in her room touching upon him. —Let me see in this silence the woman in her room.

Her quiet words did not obtrude upon a silence whose margin he caught as it waved. He saw her a battered creature. He saw her absurdity of

painted cheeks, two imitation flowers stuck in the ruts of a road. He sat in a room whose dinginess enarmed him. He sat in the misery of this woman. He sat deep.

“Still so cold out?” Over her head a chandelier . . brass gas, hideous brutal under the flecked ceiling. His feet glowed with renewing warmth. In his eye beneath his shoes a carpet of acid green.

—We sit . . She sits in a cloud of dinginess. Sharp spirit veiled in a cloudy flesh. Now: centers of glow, thrown from the woman, solid like her spirit. He was aware of loveliness.

Under the blow of the chandelier a delicate Pembroke table . . book and a glass of whisky.

—Under my arms, pressing against my back, a high arched Windsor chair.

In the break of her hip, standing, a Hepple—white desk.

—We have no furniture like this at home!

She spoke. He peered into the form of her words. His eyes took the gloss of the subtle table, it was one with her words' accent. Futile words . . grammatical, well-ordered. A subtle table, and beyond a virulent huge sideboard. A faint quaint accent in her pointless words curling like heat of hidden flame above the table, against the sideboard: whispers in how she spoke, like these glowing poems in wood, of a day distant from his New York where there had been leisure and when from the dung of human misery America grew flowers.

A quiet pain in the table and her words . . a

distant pain. He **did** not put his immediate question.

She felt his pause; in it drew up her chair. She sat he thought with grace athwart him at the table. The whisky glass was gone, he had not noticed her hide it. The book was there with her hand. Black little book. *Bible!* He felt her feeling him feel her. Now she was silent.

They were silent upon each other. Heavily.

His brow twitched. —Let me see her! She was cold and helpless. He understood he could not understand. She seemed a chaste woman with burnt eyes. She drew him.

Words to pull him aloof: "I am afraid we don't read that book . . half enough. . . I don't I mean," he blushed. "Do we, Mrs. Luve?"

—Wrong. Wrong! A delicate line left . . he felt *left* . . under her folded thin lip. Lip folded away.

"It's a rattling good book."

"O but *you* do."

"I?"

"*You* read it enough. . . You're a Jew."

"I'm a Jew," he repeated. Above her and the table the flourishes and bulgings of the chandelier . . brass gas . . were lewd. "I'm a Jew. If there's any soul in me worth speaking of, it's in that book." She leaned forward upon the table with elbows drawn tight back. "Yet I can't read a word of it, except in English . . I'm ashamed of that."

She laughed embarrassed. He was understanding deeper he could not understand. She was up

swiftly. She took the Bible, opened a door in the sideboard. Glint of glasses, plush, odor of liquors. She placed the Bible within them.

"I suppose," a smile to her face, the first: as sudden again her face was grey, ". . . you came for Thelma?"

"Why . . . yes." —Of course for that I came, for that only I come ever to your dirty flat . . . She has delicate fingers. . . How else did I come at first? Dirty? There was a silence fringing his questions, veiling them, making them false. In the silence the presence of strangeness.

"I am afraid I may not be able to get her . . . right away."

Her fingers curled up. He felt how they had drooped from the hard square palms like shoots frozen in a cold Spring.

"There's just a chance. If you'll . . . excuse me I'll phone."

The door shut him in.

He sat quiet because he wanted to get up, hunt for something. Bible? He walked up and down because he wanted to stay, hoped she would find Thelma.

He needed Thelma to-night. . . . He knew this.

—I do not feel it now. For only a sharp need brought him to this flat he despised. Where alone Thelma would meet him. —I am here again. I must need Thelma. Mrs. Luve was back.

"I'm sorry. Thelma's gone to a Show, with some friends. There's just a chance . . . later . . .

she might possibly go after eleven to the Garden Cafe. I could phone there, then." Mrs. Luve stood in the door, her face was bright, she smiled again it was grey. "You——"

He shook his head, not getting up. She did not stir also. Her face was bright. Her mouth trembled. He said: "Have you any beer, Mrs. Luve? We might have a drink?"

He could not help seeing her, seeing her more and more. Frail slain fingers resting upon a table warmer than her hand. She all a sapling broken in frost . . standing seasons dead.

—What is there here to see? He pulled a bill from his pocket. As his hand went toward hers, a hot wind stopped it. He felt them both cold. Under her eyes he saw a shadow like a whip's mark.

He put his money away.

She left the room.

She returned, she carried a silver platter. Upon it a bottle of wine. Two slim glasses.

It was long silence now, with them less heavy against it. Silence full with its own mood, its own blood, strong to live.

The wine stood erect on the subtle table. Mrs. Luve leaned and poured of it, a drop first in her glass, then his glass full, then her glass full. Her bare arm pouring red wine came from a dim kimona.

. . . In the face of a worn woman black eyes burning: eyes blazing against the face, leaping from face and woman: eyes touching the red of the wine.

He felt: —I am disappearing.
There is a silence like light
Upon us.
Moving like light a silence
Upon words.
There will be words moving in light:
There will be lighted words. . . .

TWO
RIVER GARDEN



SPRING . . . a Southern city in song. A city drifting fading into the wide arms of earth, into trees, fields running under grass, into trees, into high thrusts of earth, into trees, trees. The city a raised shadow upon earth. Against earth's sweep through the Precinct of suns and stars, apart from sun and stars—blotch of hard houses leaning back upon the dead days of their makers—whole city leaning back, falling away from the wide freedom of sun, earth, stars, twirling together locked. And they two . . . man and girl . . . clasped in the steadfast spin of life—sun stars earth dust—that swung away from the city.

Fanny Dirk was on her back. Under: grass, roots thrusting up in erection, spilling in bud. Over: he. Under and over: One. She was viced in One: Grass, hair, fingers, twigs broken to leaf, lips and earth hot against her . . . One. She was surrounded by One. She was beyond distinctions. She was One. She was in ecstasy. . .

Then they walked to their horses on the distant road.

A house, coddling itself warm, despite bright elms, in its shadows of men, cast a grey finger up from the Town to the young man's mind. His house . . . running no longer away from the immobile dance of earth and sun . . . reached up now, arrogant, clambered with its long harsh

shadows into the mind and mood of his mother's and father's son.

"Fanny!"

—Harry, Harry . . . O you . . . you my life!

"Fanny, now we must get married."

—Hush! I hate you. How can you speak so now?

"Why are you silent, Fanny? I'm a gentleman, little girl. Don't think I respect you less, because you love me. . . I love you . . . we . . ."

—No respect, then!

" . . . will be married. You are not less the lady."

—Stop, stop, stop!

"Secretly, of course. Till I am done with College. Not so long, Honey. You can wait? We'll have a real wedding, then."

—Can't you stop? What are you killing? What are you killing? Can't we stop?

Fanny Dirk became the wife of Harry Howland Luve.

* * *

Mrs. Luve held her slender glass in frail spent fingers. She sipped. Her hot eyes swept above frail flesh, spun glass.

—I want you to see me! I want you to see me!

Mr. Samson nodded. —What else can I do?

—Can you see this? I was as fresh and ruddy as a maple blossom! . . .

She was hard, she was intact. Her husband took her to a little house on the best street: three

squares away was the Luvé Mansion which one day should be his. "This is our home. It's small dear. But so are you small. We'll live here till our love bursts it."

He was tall and thin, yet he gave the air of softness. His big black eyes being soft, his delicate hair that lay thinning on the transparent tinge of his brow gave his sapling body the air of holding a softness. He had small dimpled hands tapering to fingers with which to hold her who was hard and intact.

"O I love it!"

She did not love the hard Luvé Mansion, her own home had been prim and small, her hardness needed tender and small things of the world.

"O I love it, Harry! I'm glad it's no larger. O—what a kitchen! Can't I do for you right snug in that gem of a kitchen."

"No, sweet, not that. Mammy Sue comes along. I can't say No to Mammy. I can't begin *now* saying No . . . when I'm married. She's been waiting', fixin' for that. She's been totin' me from a baby just for that. You'll surrender, Honey! She loves you for making me surrender . . . to her."

"And I bake such biscuits."

"You may . . . when Mammy's not looking."

She made him sit down. "You're so high!" She clapped her hands. Sharp, she kissed his hair, his eyes, his nose, his mouth. Sharp kisses. Each finger tip she kissed. "O—O you!" She opened his waistcoat, she opened one button

of his shirt. A sharp kiss on his chest. She leaped away, clapped her hands.

"I'll manage Mammy."

"Whom couldn't you manage?"

—You. . . I leap gaily clapping my hands, my Love. I leap on Pain, on the shadow of Doubt I leap. What can I do with you?

She was on her knees: her arms embraced his legs, her cheek was hot against his cold shoes.

—Under the Pain is there sunlight for dancing?

Under the doubt is there a solid world?

"She loves me," said to himself Harry Howland Luve. "Blessed sweet!" —Well, I've married her. She's married to a Luve. She's leaping, dancing on a joy I can understand.

* * *

Mrs. Luve and Mr. Samson talked of small matters pleasantly.

—He sits there sweetly, chatting of small matters. O it is good. O it is cool water. Bless you! He leaves me alone, he does not touch me. I am myself. We move marvelously into myself. He is content there, merely talking, with me a woman, of small matters.

—I have a mind, good mind for others. You shall have the benefit of that whenever you need it. I'll find out whenever . . . good good Boy! . . .

—I am alone. That is the blessing of talking with you here on cool small matters. You do not touch me as the world does when I am alone with no one. O you heal me: will you at least, after

these years, these years, such years, be my healer? Not touching! The heal and the health and the miracle of that. Not touched, at last. The years full of bloody bubbles, each year a bubble of my blood unhealed. I shall not tell you of myself. You will feel. . . .

—For thanks of God . . your God . . I embrace you, Boy. When one has a God one can have cool small matters. Let us talk on, for your God's sake, of your cool small matters.

* * *

“Why do you drink? O Harry . . why, why now?”

“You are not always there. At College you were not there, Fanny. Drink was. One took what was to take.”

“But now . . .”

“Drink was there first. O I don't know. When I am drunk I am wrapped in warm smooth clinging stuffs—like entrails—like insides of a great warm creature. When I drink I am wrapped in a woman. . . Let me creep into you, Beloved. Farther, nearer. O you are so *whole*. Won't you let me creep away inside of you?”

“Harry I am all open to you. Come.”

“No dear. O my love! No, dear, I can't. God damn you. You entice me . . impossibly. There you are—you are a woman, *there*. I can't touch you . . you're *there*. I am here. Touch you? Break you. I'd smash you into this air if I could. Damn you! Damn you. Why shouldn't I have

another drink? *It goes inside of me . . . all of it . . . serves me . . . warms me. It's mine, that. Going inside of me, same as me going inside of it. Inside of you . . . impossibilities. God damn your sure solid eyes. Let me get out."*

She lifted his head from her lap. "Go then."

He rose uneasy to his feet. He wiped straying silk hairs from his swimming eyes. He turned: stumbled: sank. He sobbed.

She placed him on his back on the floor: cradled his head in her hands.

"Let me get out! Let me get out!" he shouted, motionless.

"Sh-sh. You can go."

"Fanny, Fanny," he whispered, "hold me . . . hold me still." His body swung on the floor, the floor careened about his eyes. Her arms, cradling him, swaying his head, were alone moveless.

She dragged him to bed. He was a helpless drunken child. She undressed him. Her hands, touching his naked body, brought to his face a veil of ease. Her hands ceased. He raised his naked flesh from the hot covers.

"Give me a drink!"

"No."

His eyes swung back from the wall of her response. But his arms surged forward, they caught her. He dragged her against his naked flesh. . . .

She, little woman, sat in her rocking chair on the porch, looked up at the flood of sun and tried to find the world.

—Up the sun that is warm and good, up the
sun that blinds me

Struggling, not overwhelmed, I send my
eyes . . .

She was clad in a pink dress whose dainty softness brought clear the silvery atunement of her body. There was naught slack in her. Her bare arms were a gentling, a subtle rounding of her bones: a haze of dark hair on them: hands rose intact and long from the fine wrists like flower from stem. The little breasts stood in the pink tulle, alert, infinitely one with the awareness of her eyes and wrists . . . like the antennæ of a bug holding the world upon their frailty.

She sat challenging sun: not wilting: waiting her husband.

—Every day now he drinks. He gambles. He loves me. What have I to do with cards and liquor?

She, larger woman, sat deeper in her chair: lost now in a swathing gown of gray that rose like a wave to her white neck. Her shoulders and her chest; bare, were still planturous in their running variance of plane and mood: strong seeking chin, throat swelling as if with graceful words, chest rising downward from the aloof virginity of her neck to the slow fulness of her heavying breasts. Fanny was pregnant. She sat there . . . taut limpid body . . . in the sun, eyes unwilted, about her child like a sunny song hiding an omen. She sat there gradually giving way . . . her taut and limpid sun-

shape giving way . . to the dark press of a swollen larva tangled inside her blood, pressing, kicking, sucking weight to rend.

Harry Luve was gone three days, without a word . . plenty of signs. She knew.

—He has gone. I shall see him again. O yes. Long after I have looked in my child's eyes. Thank God for that! I shall look long, years perhaps? long and deep in my baby's eyes in order to understand how I must see him again.

His going down was simple like all of Harry Luve . . . simple like a very plaintive song. She sat between the high sun and the low wail of her husband: balanced about a child.

How sustain the light madnesses of College? except in drink and gambling. How nourish the child in him he was? save with the rolling bloods of liquor, the swift tossings, cradlings, plungings of luck at cards. At the end of deep immersement in a helpless joy forever Birth which was an end: the Birth here at last Disgrace, as the Birth once air. Too much money lost, too much folly of a night in his cups. A woman half dead, half naked, bent across a table, a mirror smashed, ten thousand dollars debt. A birth that! Harry slipped down into it as doubtless he had slipped from his mother's womb . . whimpering, blinking, inarticulate—nostalgic. He was gone.

But his father had Honor to groom. The debt was paid, the woman was salvaged and sent off. No word in the papers.

“He will find out he's safe . . turn up, sobered

. . my Dear. Never worry," his father assured her.

"And I . . . ?"

"You are his wife, Frances. You must wait."

She got up.

"Will you move my chair, Colonel Luve . . over there?"

She walked, clear slender neck and legs with her child so full before her her walk seemed to say: "My child comes first."

Her husband's parent shook his head.

"What can you do, my daughter? You must wait . . ."

She sank in her new-placed chair.

". . in the sun."

—She is pregnant, Colonel Luve explained away the inconsequent words.

Fanny waited.

* * *

"I know your name . . I knew it always . . now you will let me?—*Samson Brenner*."

"You say my name as if it meant something."

"Perhaps it does. Perhaps it does. Go on."

"I sometimes wonder why I am studying Law. Writing poems is more fun . . and you know? seems *realler!*"

"Yet you distrust writing poems . ."

"—bad poems."

"Bad because you distrust doing anything for fun?"

"You know, I think you're right!"

He smiled like a child, pleased but a bit scared when he finds true what he had sought in make-believe. His brow wrinkled. He turned away from the brass glare of the light.

"That light is horrid," she said.

"—all substitutes for the sun," he said.

"That is so."

"Yet what a wonder what a glory," his body stiffened, "that we should have a substitute at all!"

"Why glory, Samson Brenner, if the substitute is false? . . . Wait."

Mrs. Luve came back. She placed two candles between them on the Pembroke table.

"Shut out the gas," she said.

There was blackness, heavy, hot, clasping them both. Two jets of liquid glow tongued from the mellow wood, made the wood lift and gleam like a sun's ray through moving cloud: cast wreathings subtle, evanescent, out against the blackness.

They were quiet. The candles . . two fingers rose, touched them across the table, joined them, hushed them.

"May I say something to you?"

"What, Mrs. Luve?"

"You have a tongue that speaks truth, you have a tongue that lies."

"Haven't we all?"

"You must not have a tongue that lies: for you have a tongue that is true."

"Haven't we all . . .?"

"You must not——"

—He does not see himself.
He moves through a black Hole
Bright—pouring brightness.
Where is a Sun whereby a Sun may see?

—I have ten fingers . . . ten to weave a Web
To catch at God.
Too frail—too fine . . . yet you slip
through?

* * *

Fanny looked out from her back sun-parlor upon trees.

Beside a high grey wall rose the thick life of a magnolia; beech and cherry and dogwood sang their light swift presences, a lawn was fresh like dew.

“Trees,” she murmured . . . —They have waited the Winter. It is Spring, they prepare to give a whole new life—blossom and seed. That is why it is Spring. Each year . . . at their feet the dead leaves sink and rot. They push forth new ones. Each year . . . They cannot help themselves.

She could go no farther. —Helpless bravery. . . . Upstairs in her cradle Edith slept. Harry was gone, voiceless, eight months. She was imprisoned in her man’s absence, in her child’s presence.

She had a dream. Harry jumped on his black horse, stood over her in his stirrups. He ribboned the black flanks red with his spurs. The

horse leaped: as he flew away he leaned to her and cut deep her breast with his crop . . . She awoke thinking of Edith. Her child was the red salute of Harry's going: the scar of it. She loved her child.

She had a dream. A tall man with a baby's face lay crowding in her arms. She could kiss his baby's face, but he had tall legs, they spun and twirled about her. They struck a lamp which fell, the house was in flame. All of the town rushed into her house: she saw his father and mother, her mother who was dead and brother . . all of the city came into her sitting among flame holding a baby face. They stood there, pointing, poisoning, sneering at her. "What is she going to do? She sat rigid holding her baby face. "What a fool, she sits there nursing a dead child with fire all about her!" She was helpless.

Now, sitting, watching the brave helpless trees she could go no farther. She had a child whom she loved and who was the wound of another love upon her.

—Trees do not think, they are brave helplessly. Why am I not brave? Trees lift into air. I am buried.

She was buried. Her friends and her relations, seeing her Mrs. Luve, buried her daily. Her child, seeing her mother, buried her daily. Her husband, a distant stroke in a far world, ploughing, ploughing like steel . . heaping the soil of his ploughings forever upon her, buried.

—Trees do not think. I try to think. Thinking is bad for Winter. Thinking is bad for Spring.

Thinking chills Spring. Thinking calls sap to Winter which Winter kills. Yet I must think . . for I am motionless. To think is to move when one is motionless. Trees move forever. Leaf and trunk move upward, circle out: seed moves downward, inward. Trees swing forever so they are thoughtless. But I am a broken curve, a splintered part of a Circle I cannot see . . . My thought's a finger feeling from the line of my brokenness for a Roundness beyond me.

—What am I going to do? How am I going to think?

She was the wife of Harry Howland Luve. Pretty clever astounding Fanny Dirk: here's a riddle for your independence, which we . . your Town . . have had to swallow ever since you were a child bossing your schoolmates, snubbing the smart young men, running through the gray-mossed tangles of our thoughts and ways like an April wind through a sleepy August. You have shocked us, angered us, made us love and accept you. You caught the best match of Town . . here is a riddle for you, smartie Fanny Dirk!

He will come back: she was very quick to find her own way, her own words for it: yet who of us dare say she was not always the lady? Mrs. Harry Luve. He will come back. Nothing for her after all but to sit and wait him. . . .

She had a dream. Her bed was a vast blackness. —It is white, I have no eyes so my bed is black. It was soft and rich, it was comfortable. She lay within it, folded, lost, and it was white vast comfort all about her. A Hand from a sharp wrist

thrust down, clasped her throat . . pressed. She was pressed deeper within the bed: as the Hand pressed down her throat was deep beneath her body, deep beneath her head: her mind and her blood rushed down from her head and body to her swollen throat that a white Hand pressed. The bed unfolded lip within lip as had her body when Harry loved her: now her body cut deep into the bed . . enfolded it was lost in the bed's blind comfort. . . She saw the Hand that pressed her down by the throat. Upon one finger was the ring of Harry: upon another finger was the wedding ring she had worn secret for a year, and was the diamond ring set in platinum which he had given her later. The Hand was colorless like the shell of a departed locust. The wrist above it was long and red and moist. The Hand, pinning her throat, was dry, her throat was dry. She lay there cased in her hot bed . . frozen: under a Hand that pinned her.

She got up. She went to her child and held her in her arms. Edith slept. She held her close against her breast. She stiffened her arms in order to be still. Within, a voice shrieked: "Wake, wake!" It touched the air through her hardened nipples. It touched her child. Edith awoke. She placed her back in her crib.

"Sleep, daughter . . always sleep."

Saying these words, she felt her gums were hard; it was her gums, it was her teeth that said them. Her lips were still! She kissed her daughter.

—Lips had better kiss.

The child, who had lain wide-eyed silent, fell asleep. . .

Fanny stood beside her bed. It loomed like a white sucking mouth—white lips. She pulled a quilt away, sank to the floor. With knees high huddled in her arms, near her chin, and the quilt lightly touching her bare toes, her knees, her mouth, she slept on the floor. The world's blackness, the ghost-grained night of her sleep was not the world, not her sleep . . . was the bed above her. Blackness was spun white threads come to rest: each thread beside the other, each thread of white not touching any other. She lay escaped from her Bed in undulant hardness, she flowed . . . at last at rest . . . like a red worm through water. . .

—At this Party too, they aren't going to let me be gay!

All they would not let her. They smiled on her and carefully patterned their talk. They had eyes forever wiping against her thoughts. They must have hated her, had she been gay and forgetful of her loss. They did not want to hate her. They preserved her low and broken where they did not need to hate her. "Dear poor Fanny—so *brave!*" Their words and their ways announced: "We try to be gay with you, we try to make you gay." They would not let her be gay. They hoisted their talk uphill against the evident pull of their sole interest in her, of their solemn compassion for her. They would not let her forget. "We are being gay, we are trying to cheer you up.

We are talking with you of indifferent matters.”
So. . . .

Fanny waited . . here too. In these bright congestions of men and women was there not surely somewhere a color that went with her own, a tone that could make her vibrate? She waited in stiff rigor, not knowing she waited. . . Gowns and shoes . . words put on like gowns and shoes over different flesh. She smelt at times under satin and starch warm flesh that needed air. She sat and let herself be talked to, be sympathized with, be gloated over. —If only you’d shout you are glad! Healthy that, naked . . O no. She was stiff as in death.

A tall man, dark . . . —Newcomer, strange . . moved up to her and spoke. Words not spawned or swerved by her own story: words she needed not to hear since they were fending away a world that would not let her be gay. In a new separateness Fanny felt herself. . .

Felt herself laughing.

Found her feet, after his quiet resolute own, pattering out to a seclusive alcove.

She saw him. —I don’t size you up. I don’t care! You release my feet and my laughter. You are big strong . . black . . what are you?

He came to her home.

Her ears did not count, yet her ears did for they had given her a label to stick on him so he could pass through her door . . . Leon Dannen-

berg—attorney from Washington—Government lawyer—on short business here. He passed through. More than her eyes saw that he was very strong with hands full of ease. She leaned back in her rocker: her toes jutted forward: they twinkled against his black strength.

They chatted, she had no ears, she had voice. She was gay.

When he left her: "You are unhappy, Mrs. Luve," he said. "I think you are the unhappiest woman I have known. You must be strong, then . . . too."

She took his hand and liked how her hand was lost in his hand that was full of ease.

"You let me be gay."

"I'm coming whenever this Case . . . and these Conferences . . . let me."

"I have respect for you," he said. He took her in his arms and kissed her. . .

He said: "We are strangers . . . we are strangers who respect each other."

"Help me," he said.

"Help you?"

"Help me to bring you to yourself. You are stunned. Ill things come over you and you are stunned, you cannot make yourself clean. . . . I want you naked. Help me. Naked against me naked. You will be at last yourself . . . inviolate. Help me!"

He undressed her. She helped him to undress

her. She lay in his arms: lost sweetly like a tree in a warm wind.

"You make me feel that I have roots," she told him.

She found that she had been buried in a corroding silence. She was lifted forth. She had words.

"You are strong," he said, "and you have been a fool."

Holding her in his arms, he was to her a sunrise . cool . . cutting mists and a dim sleep. She lay in him like a warm creature in a gentle sun, sucking sun . . all open.

"Soon I must go . . back to Washington . . my home."

"You have a home?"

"Why do you doubt it?"

"You are so strong away from home."

"You are a glory, Frances Luve. You are a spirit like a tree, standing alone on a single rock in a marshland."

"That is what you think of my people?"

"That is what I think of your people."

"But have you a home?"

"The Western World," he smiled with a fine bitterness that hurt her. "I am a Jew, you know."

"Yes . . I know," she hushed.

"The first Jew you have ever known?"

"The first . . ."

"Do you know me, Fanny?"

"Will I ever know? . . . You are going away."

"That is right, also."

"Yes." She looked at him. She sat high above his prone strong body; looked at him. "Yes, it is right. I look at you. You are beautiful. You are clean. You are wilful and straight. You have black curling hair like a savage dance all over the white tenderness of your body. You have eyes that look forever. Yet I do not love you. I love my husband. He is weak and dirty. Until you came I said: 'He is weak and dirty, I hate him.' You came with your clear strength. You took me naked. I took you naked. Because I have taken you clean and strong I know that it is he whom I love."

He held her hand.

"There is God," he said, "May he bless you."

"What does that mean . . . if He blesses?"

"The Jews in three thousand bloody years have not found out."

"I tell you I do not love you: I tell you and you bless me."

"I reverence you, Fanny. You are clear like water. Love is a word I have not won the use of."

"What have you done to me!"

"You are water, Frances. You were muddied and thick. You can look down, now, through the clearness of yourself, to the dirt base of yourself . . ."

“ . . to Harry!”

“See him clear, through your own clean-ness.”

“You are strong. O how strong you are, you man who have won for yourself a power in the world that hates you. Your people have been beaten bloody: always, always. Beaten bloody by their God . . beaten bloody by the world to which they gave their God. They are a bent dark people. Yet you have won for yourself a body fair to see. Never shall I forget your lovely body. Yet I do not love you. I love a man who had all and who cast it away: who was fair as you were never and who has dirtied himself.”

“He only deserves your love.”

“Why that?”

“ . . if you care for him.” He took her hand again. “Since you care to care for him.” . . .

“Good-by,” he said.

She said: “The word Love is never in your mouth.”

“Good-by,” he said.

She said: “I will do what you want. . . I would do always what you want. I do not love you: but I bow to you. I kiss your feet. You are holy . . Why are you holy?”

“I have moved you only as a wind that passes.”

“You are putting me aside,” she said.

“No. I touch your branches. I spread them. I take seed of you with me to the fallow meadows. I do not stir your roots.”

“They feel sunshine for you have spread me open.”

"I do not stir your roots—because I have respect for the word Love."

"Good-bye, then, Leon. I shall find out what this great truth is . . this truth I know, the first truth I have ever known . . that you are holy."

"Good-by," he said. Then he went.

* * *

Mrs. Luve looked through the golden flame of an old table, of two candles, burning within the blackness of her room. There . . not of the mellow flame, not of the dark . . a young man speaking of small matters. Where the flame touched him he glowed; where the night touched him his body withdrew harsh into shadow. What is this encaverned boy, talking of small matters?

—He is plump: he is a boy: he has no strength of his own. He is very strong and he is very old. Blond hair curls from bland brow. They are Jews . . *he* was straight like steel, hard, sure. So gentle. Sureness alone is gentle in a fumbling world. . . *Arc you hard also?*"

—You do not know, but I have seen your parents. If I said so would you flush? would your heart rush back in panic, hide in your flesh I have touched by seeing your parents? She counted me change so soberly . . correct, correct . . 'If I make a mistake against you I will lose by and by: if I make a mistake against me I lose now.' The greed of justice in your mother counting me change. That time when the clerks were all busy and I in a hurry, your father came out smiling,

sold me—what was it?—sausage and cheese? So simple, so condescending he was. You are the child of such parents. They have saved: they have saved in justice of greed, in justice of condescension: and of this saving of their greed and arrogance, you buy your College books, you buy your poetry books, you buy your hours here. Aren't you ashamed? No he is not ashamed. He is right. Sausages and dollars saved are slime, are lies. You are true, Samson Brenner. You are older than your stinking parents.

She filled his glass with wine.

He sipped. His eyes were hot amber in an iron vat. He asked no question, he sipped.

“Do you want to hear the poem?” he said.

—I hear it already. “Repeat it.”

He did not question her words, he did not question her wine. He took them. His head bent forward. He held his face in his hands . . . soft hands. He spoke his poem through soft hands. The poem was a stiff, an alien thing: but her words she had not spoken in the glow of his face were his and came back to her, a poem.

—I become myself. I become untouched. Speak on, Boy. Make me untouched! . . . He has young eyes—the shadows that rim them are marked by thousand years. . . .

THE world was a sunny field and the young mother walked in it and was herself. Each thing was itself, stood clear up in the sunny field of the world. Black ant over a tuft of grass held the sun in its blackness. Grass threw sparkle of sun against a blue sky dazed with sunniness. —I too walking and carrying the sun. I am very sharply myself, like an ant, like a leaf, throwing with them the sun in a vast gold shower upward into the sky . . .

Leon was gone: there would be no word of any sort further between them.

Fanny had a way of sitting on her porch and pinching the flesh of her bared arm. Solid! She loved her solidness—I am real! She was sunny with feeling her flesh and her soul real.

—Harry is coming back. O I know! I must be ready, I must be *real*.

She was real. Her thoughts, her feelings, her pain were petal and stamen and pistil of the full flower of her realness. Sitting now, different, in her little house where she had been abandoned . . above the pry and the impudent concern of those about her, above the hurt and the insult of Harry's going . . facing the sacrament of his return—how? beaten, broken?—fully, as she had faced no truth in all her life.

. . With her child in arms she could pinch bravely and find real. . .

—I can kiss you now—Baby! little sister!—we wait together for him who is coming back.

—Coming at last. For the first time coming. There was a holy man. He released us, stripped us naked to ourselves. And because of a holy man, we can wait real now, sure, intact, so gently wait and so long, for a man who is coming.

—We need not ask who he is. He is ours. He will find us and love us, won't he, little sister? . . and leave us no more.

—Like you! O my blessed baby—like you whom I was strong enough to bear, not strong enough till now to look upon—like you he is ours.

—O the black night into which you were born, my child.

O the long pain you stood upon: it rose like a flame from my womb you stood upon . . up, up throughout you, to your eyes and fingers.

O the black night of fiery pain you were, with your sucking mouth upon my naked flesh. . . .

We dawn together, Love, into a sleep where
with eyes open
Cooly we walk toward Day.

Fanny held her child and again she looked unwilted into sun. It was to her as if she gazed on a bright field, and there above flowers, under a sky, stood a woman sheer with a child in her arms. Her feet in grass were cool. Her hair in sky was

cool. She was sheer, cool . . . unburned by the fires of birth. She was born . . . washed clean of the bloods of birth and born. Very cool, very sheer. So Fanny saw herself.

. . . Saw certain things making her sunny field of the world—as the light of her vision lay clarified in context of green thrusts running, forms sprayed and ashift over earth.

She had long talks holding her child in her arms. . . .

“I must be more to him when he comes back than I was ever! I can be more!

“I accept you, Harry. I have no pride, I am humble. I challenge drink, gaming, women. I am ashamed no longer. I shall beat them. I shall crowd them out. I shall be for you what they lied seeming they could be for you. You will find me everywhere, meet me nowhere. No obstruction. You will find me risen in a great pride, in a great strength, now that my pride is gone and I have lain, prostrate naked, sucking the strength of a stranger.”

—O stranger! not a thought more for you. Not a thought. That is as you will. Harry, he made me love you.

She went into her room, stripped her clothes from her shoulders. She looked in a glass at her nakedness, feeling under her eyes her shoulders gleam like cool flames upward.

It was strange: her shoulders were untouched, her breasts had not fallen. —I am whole! Come, Harry, take me.

There had been a wind, there had been a bath

for her naked shoulders. She was naked, flushed by a swift wind . . gone . . cleansed by a running water . . run away. —I am whole, I am born. Will you come, Harry, so you can see the woman who has been born?

She stood long, looking at her naked self. She was clad in a bloom. She was a hard young world in its first Spring. She found that she was laughing. She pressed her laughing fingers into her firm breasts.

“I am good,” she said, very sober. She caught up her child. Cheek upon hers she swayed, very still, very sober. “O we are good. Good, we two! Won’t you hurry, Man?”

“Now I see you. Clear! Never has any woman seen her love as I see you. I am a woman born. Edith dear, look at your Mother. You are a child born . . I am a woman born. I am rarer than you! I am very rare. I see you clear, you little sucking flesh. Sweet, sweet! I see him clear; wistful yearnful boy, with a soul all wrinkled and athrob like your forehead, Sweet, when you were born . . a soul open and empty and greedy like your mouth, when you were born.

“ . . Come, suck me, you two dear ones!”

—Do I see my love clear? If I do, I see a fading. . . . “I abdicate that sight, my dear Beloved. My hands must not shake, when you come back to me shaking.”

—What is love? what is a field? . . a running of sweet grass over earth, grass leaping away from the earth in which it lives. . . My love is you and you . . that is seeing enough!

—Love is the field and woodlands of the world.
She was a little woman waiting for her husband. . . .

Strange news came to her world of Harry Howland Luvé . . . thrilled it, made it talk. . . .
“Blood will tell.” . . . “After the wild oats the sturdier planting.” . . . “God has his way.” . . .
“From one drunkenness to another.” Fanny took to herself the news and felt it true. The path of her man came clear in her white mind.

—I feel him, all the way he has crawled livid red from my hands. He turns, full flow, to my breast! She saw his path like a writing.

The Reverend Doctor Poole brought her his gift of comfort wrapped in complacence.

She made him sit down, he chose the stiffest chair. —I must subdue myself, she felt. He was brittle, little. She held back the flood of herself. But it was easy since his sharp small eyes not knowing she was a flood, brought her help.

“Your husband, my Dear, has found Christ.

“It happened in New York. Never mind, my child, where . . . and who shall ever say How? He has found Christ and like Him he has risen. More, my daughter. Like Him, he is walking the ways of men bringing God’s word. Who has found Christ *truly*, in every respect must act like Him. I am very gratified . . . very grateful. I have come to you, my daughter, . . . you have neglected our Church, never mind, Dear, the strayed sheep is the dearest to the Lord and to the hum-

blest Pastor . . to pray with you Thanksgiving and rejoicing. Your husband will be here soon. You know from his dear father what he's doing? . . He goes from College to College telling young men how he slipped down the pleasant path to Hell—and at its gate found Christ . . . I have had word from colleagues in Princeton, Yale, Williams . . elsewhere. His effect on the student bodies is amazing, electrifying. A true evangel. He is eloquent, simple . . rather his message is, that speaks through his lips. The students learn how he . . as they do . . played a little, drank a little, smoked—all the little innocent indulgences . . and what horror happened. They flock up, after his visit, and sign the pledge of Purity, join fellowship in Christ. He has received invitations from dozens of Christian institutions to come with his message, to help save our Christian youth. He has found a true work, indeed. . . And you, daughter, have been worthy of him . . waiting. Prepare yourself now for the return of your Bridegroom.”

* * *

Face clawed close by myriad tiny fears and horrors. Hot eyes. Feet stumbling. As Harry's body lurched forward, his feet stumbled faster to support it. Hands dead white leaves, dry, crackling at his sides. . . A saloon swings open, his head bowed above thin shoulders twitches in, away from the crash of an impending train above on its swinging iron rail. Wave of acrid beer,

soiled flesh, wet clothes. Above it, his head a moment is still. . . . Sober. Harry steps up to the bar, with sharp feet and hands marshalling sudden to his head against the lazy swing of his body within the fetid wave. He grasps a glass of whiskey, carries it untouched before him to a corner. Bodies huddled like hulks of beef or pork, covered with rags. He floats above them, finds a seat, bowing to a naked wooden table. Invitation. Glass elbows on the naked table. Head on the table? No! —One gulp to swing my body free with my sharp head . . . to soberness. . . So . . . —*What am I?*

Harry Howland Luve gazed on his world. A man snoring near him blew a spray of blood from his mashed nose. A man, beside a barrel, let his fingers trail like grey worms through the sawdust . . . a red tongue broke through the muck of his mouth, licked the grey worms of his hands, he slept again. At the bar, careening like ships on a wave of the world, heads dipped into huge glasses, swung against mirrors, broke thudding upon a window upon a wall that was a grin of hardness. —What am I? Harry Howland Luve laboriously counted his fingers. . . —One two three four . . one two three four . . one two: my God! where is my fifth finger? “I lack a finger! I lack a finger!” Body with head feet hands was one . . a toss, a catapult from the stinking Harp House into a darkness clear, biting, without, beneath the surge of the “L.” He flew. “I lack a finger.” He stopped. “What else do I lack?” Again a train. He was caught. He could not move. —It is com-

ing over! He was clamped; the train's murmur rose to a beat, a roar, a crash. Iron and wood and steam shrieked and stampeded, mounted on his head. He was clamped. He was a silence of horror under a mountain of noise, crushing against the eggshell of his skull. . . . It passed . . . —I am alive. He walked quiet now, looking on the pavement tracks for his lost finger.

"You have lost something?" A black form rose from the street like smoke on a clear night. "Yes . . . I have lost . . . have lost . . ." "Perhaps," said the smokey man, "I can help you to find. Come along, Brother." He clasped his arm. The smokey man of God, the white seeker of color moved down the cavern of Chatham Square where the high houses dimmed away like stalactytes and the "L" thrust its lance into the belly of a world too weary to cry, too worn to bleed. Before him Harry Luve held his white dry hand. "My finger," he muttered. "Yes," said the man of God. "I see . . . your pointing finger . . .".

He sat in a quiet room. Coffee and a sandwich rolled in his raw stomach. "That tastes good, eh?" said the man of smoke. "Hot, eh? Whiskey makes you shiver, I'll bet." Luve held his hands together and began to cry. "Heat is the best thing in the world. Good heat is God. False heat is the Devil . . . and makes you shiver," he said. "Another cup of coffee?"

"My finger . . . my finger!" "Brace up, man. You're a gentleman. You were. I can see that. See clear, and you're whole." . . . "How can I

see clear when I lack . . I lack—" . . . "Hush—listen."

There was a sound like a soft white quiet on a red wound. Music.

"Bow your head, Brother . . . Listen."

The quiet crept upon his body. Tucked in his toes, moistened his hands, lay on his mouth. The quiet was warm. Was music. Harry shut his eyes. The wave of the world, booze and streaking men, fell away. He was in a flatness downy with gentle grass above a gentle river. His feet hurt, he was glad, hurting was living. A warm cloud muffled his head: through his eyes and mouth, through the warm cloud came words:

"Our Father which art in Heaven . . . thy Kingdom . . give us this day our daily . . not into temptation . . for thine is the Kingdom . . halleluja, Blesst! . . the glory for ever and ever . . seek and ye shall find . . seek seek and and ye ye . . unto you opened . . unto you, opened . . Blood of the Lamb, red blood, . . there is a quiet house, all white, where it is warm this bitter Winter night . . all warm a quiet house . . and arms holding me to a redness, passion, that is allowed. Allowed . . hallowed . . hallowed . . allowed. Christ smiles on it, his blood is red and holy . . . Fanny's red, I have seen her red blood. Since I have married her, holy . red and holy . . knock and it shall be . . opened . . red warm, dear . . all white is the blood of the Christ. . ."

The smokey man was speaking: "Miracle is not dead."

Harry Luve rolled around upon his face. The music was still. A new quiet, also warm, wrapped him about. He rolled and rolled in a warm water. "The quiet is ever' where."

His eyes gleamed against a blackness suddenly calm and dun, a wall. He looked at a wall in a lighted room. He saw a man beside him clad in black. A hand touched his. Harry was thankful how that hand touched his.

"I have seen," he said, ". . O I have seen—"

The hand clasped his. "What, brother, have you seen?"

Harry wrenched away his hands, placed them like fenders before him.

"Let me—let me—!" he stopped. He swayed caught: he flew caught in a chord that sped with the bright room through a roaring darkness. Roar! He was dizzy. He tried to cry. He saw his hands speeding before his eyes like two birds through cavernous space. He stopped from breath . . one two three four FIVE . . he counted his flying fingers. A tiny spring sang over his eyes, sang fraying ready to break. He wanted to cry . . five five! . . a little woman flew before his hands like a white bird in the blackness. Naked. One red spot in her naked body where he had made red once . . Fanny! . . warm . . allowed. *Hallowed allowed hallowed allowed.* The red spot was a painted house home . . could be about him . . Blessed are they that mourn . . blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the poor in spirit . . comforted . . Kingdom of Heaven lead us not . . rejoice exceeding glad . . into temptation—

*“—Warm and sweet is the blood of the Lamb
That washes us sinners white.
Sinners sinners
Black and quivering sinners we
And the blood of the Lamb it warms us
It washes us sinners white.”*

. . The hand of the man in black touched his again. Smokey . . flame. Warmness, red warmness, white from hallowedness. The tiny spring burst. His eyes burst out into myriad diamond stars. A sluice opened. He was all wet His soul poured . . a pent torrent . . out: speechless whiteness.

“Something—say something, Brother! What wrestles in you? What chokes you? What do you see?”

“Christ!” gasped Harry Howland Luve: then he slept.

MRS. LUVE leaned back in her chair, took the brimming words of Samson Brenner.

They poured from him, free, full, into the dark pool of her eyes. They poured bright, candid: in the dark pool they fell dark.

—You talk of your fears and your pains: you talk of your loves and your dreams. You are a Jew, you are true. Why is the word Christ never in your mouth?

—O there is reason, deep! What is the pain of nearness—you pampered Jew, you Jew-boy, plump about sorrow—that blots the word Christ from your mouth?

“Mrs. Luve, I forget myself. I talk. I lose myself, there sudden I am. I do not know myself, but I say ‘that is me!’ ” —Pampered boy. “I talk and talk. God knows of what and why. Mrs. Luve, do I bore you?”

“You move along a path that is mine. Go on. I have no earthly thing to do but hear you.”

“You are grave!”

“Not so grave as you.”

“But I laugh. I must tell you . . . the first time I really heard laughter . . .”

—You move upon my life like a broken sun ashift through cloud at evening after a black day . . . You in the flame of my candles, you in the

black of my room. . . What is this word Christ you know too deep to utter?"

* * *

Fanny standing moved her hand from the gathered flowers on the table . . cherry and pear buds high, bowls of anemone, violets . . to her lips.

"He is coming!" She stood.

The door thrust forward—and was away from between them. Clad in white she held firm against the sight of him; tall and dark with pale hands and face, he rose from her still eyes like a column of smoke.

"Harry!" Then she held out her arms.

He shut the door. He knelt.

"Get up, husband."

He kissed her hands.

She lifted his head in her two palms, lifted him up. His lips were on hers.

They were thin, sweet, laden now with little gasps of air warmed sweet in sweet lungs: no smells of liquor and smoke like a hot corrugation scraping her sense.

He broke from her and sat in a chair. His breath was sudden, he had run a race. One hand lay, palpitant against a knee: breathless, afraid, a being out of its element. She thought of a sea. He was fished up dry from a sea.

"Harry," she spoke low. She knelt at his feet: she looked up: she could smile now.

"Get up, wife."

"No . . let me. Let me always."

His dry hands, tremulous, waved about her hair: seeking, afraid: they were moths now, fluttering upon a light: so his eyes. His face was pale and hurt turned down upon her smiling. Fluttering search collapsed. He hid his face in his hands.

"Do not cry now." She felt shut out by his hiding hands.

"I do not cry. Instead, I pray."

He looked at her. All of him was dry. From his words he seemed to have won bravery. She felt shut out in his looking.

His eyes were braver: his hands. They moved forward upon her shadowing face: they sought a thing, found it. They carried her mouth upon his, differently, upward. He stood, she under him. Her flesh touched his flesh.

Tall white flesh, scabbarded in black . . . and in prayer. Lips washed clean of liquor, scrubbed lips, thin . . . very thin. Hands corroded in cleanliness against the nape of her neck. Odorless, fireless. . . Fanny flung her arms about him. . . Shoulders pointed forward, thrusting away a world. She clasped him close.

"Harry—Harry," she cried. "O I am so glad you are——" she stopped. She lay swaying in his arms, clasping him tighter, tighter. A faint moan rose from her parted lips as her arms clasped tighter. . . .

They sat and looked at each other.

"You have loved me, Fanny."

"Yes . . . yes."

"You are my wife."

She could say no word. She could feel no thing

to turn into a word. She was a wisp of cloud: beneath her a weathercock stook still. Harry moveless pinned like a weathercock upon a bloody spike . . under a sky with one wisp of cloud.

From a fringed green horizon, memory like a wind moved up to her.

—I love him. I serve him. I have dedicated my new free strength to that. I have sworn how I was wanting, how I failed. Life now together!

“You know about me,” he said.

“I know you have come back, and I love you . . love you.”

“I must tell you all . . all the sin. You are my wife.”

“Tell me now, only that you are mine.”

“I am yours: for you are my wife since in my sinning you have loved me, Fanny. God rewards me. You were there, awaiting my conversion.”

“We are wedded at last. Do not use words I cannot understand.”

“You must hear all my sins . . ”

Why did she feel: —He is satisfied with his words?

“I know my sins. God has put upon me, as my way of being cleansed, to speak my sins. As they come forth from my mouth, they cleanse—God has made a miracle in that they cleanse. I am washed clean, speaking them. Already scores of boys, young men, hearing them, are clean. All their horror, each detail of my sins, is a hand washing clean.”

Why did she feel: —Speaking, he moves away?

—I am jealous of your sins. What are sins?

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“Tell me at once, then, Harry. Then we can bury them. Then we can start to build. Then you can come and hold me.”

“I was away more than two years. . . .”

—He has come back to hold me. . . I will hold him so he understands he has come back to hold me. . . O to be held! . . He has never held me. We were too wise, we fools, to hold each other. In a plunging world . . O my God how the world veers and plunges . . what fools not to hold each other.

He spoke, he was very eloquent and sure, dwelling again with his sins. He was warm in them. When he looked out from his hot sins to his wife, his eyes were colder.

—Hold me. Hold me! Let me hold you. Come plant your hand in my heart. He spoke, dwelling warm in his sins.

—Damn your sins!

He ended. He came to her and knelt once more. Not feeling him, she let him.

“Fanny, my dearest, my wife, my wife . . do you forgive me?”

Not feeling him there, she was very quiet.

“I do not feel, my love, that there is anything to forgive.”

She looked straight, a little to the side of his white face. She was still.

“We were young,” then she said. —I must speak. “And did not know. All that is past, but is good . . all . . since now we know.”

“I have sinned deeply. Forgive me.”

“You wandered loosely, because I held you

loose: because you did not hold me. Now we clasp each other close. It is not a sin to have been a child."

"Bless you. Bless you."

"I have learned——"

"You have been always wonderful."

"No, Harry. I have learned. I have changed."

"You . . . You have not needed to change."

She looked at him. "Two years you left me alone: and before that two years you left me alone while I was forced to live with a drunkard. Do you think these years did nothing to me?"

"You suffered."

"And what might come of suffering!"

"Fanny, my Christian wife, you were strong, you were not harmed by suffering. You remained pure. You have been not changed, dear: tempered."

"O Harry, I am afraid . . . so afraid of your words."

"You are a Christian, dear, and do not know it. That is why you are frightened by my words."

"You never saw me, Harry."

"Yes, dear, always. Under a mist, but always. The mist lifted. Darling, I must tell you: that frightful immortal night . . . you and Christ . . . I saw you both at once together."

"You never saw me. You do not know how I have changed."

"You love me?"

"O my darling!"

"You suffered, waiting . . ."

She put his hands together: helpless she beat her hands against his hands clasped hard.

“You did not give up . . . waiting, suffering?”

“I knew you would come back. I saw you, always, coming. Now I know that.”

“Then you have not changed. For you do love me, then.”

“Harry, love to survive must change.”

“Dear, dear . . . you were right. I have told my sins. Each one. You have them all. You must remember them all. Let me hold you now, in silence”

“But Harry, perhaps I too have the need of telling.”

“You have no sin.”

“No Harry, I have no sin. But there are other tidings.”

“Hush, dearest. Hold me——”

“Listen!”

He looked at her. Impatience bit his lip, puckered his eyes slightly.

“. . . Have you thought ever, Harry, of what I did, these years of waiting? of what I was? Harry, look at me clear. Have you ever tried to see me?”

“My Christian wife!”

—Patience, patience! . . . “Harry, this coming home must be beautiful, it must not be hideous. Give it your share of light, Harry. You must to save it, to make it. Look at me.”

He puckered his brow: he suffered, looking at her beauty he would . . . now he had confessed his sins . . . have preferred to kiss. —All of you, hid-

den under your white prim dress! "It is so long since I have kissed you."

"Harry, your word sin, does it cover up from your eyes what you and I have done? Am I, Harry, dearest, to fear your word sin?"

—I want to kiss you. You are my life to have forgiven me. I'm done with vice under the, the right, by God! to kiss your mouth. There.

"Your going away killed me. I was near dead before you went away. You killed me."

"Forgive me, I say."

"Never! if you use that word. Forgiveness, sin . . . they are words, Harry, that cover up. You killed me; you did not sin. You struggled for life and killed me. That is evil. I struggled for life, after your struggle had killed me. Can you imagine how I needed, alone here in the house with Edith whom you have never seen, to struggle against the death in your going buried me?"

"Edith——!"

"She is asleep. Have you thought, Harry?"

He stood up. "What can I do or say? Yes I have thought. It is that agony I brought to you which I call my sin: it is my heartache for it, my rushing back to you with hands imploring, that cries 'Forgiveness' You stop me."

"Harry you did not sin, because you needed life. Always that comes first; our need of life. I did not give you life. I don't know why, but I did not give you life. You went elsewhere, fumbled. Now I feel strong. I feel now, Love, that I can give you life. We can now, from our new

strength, at last give life to each other. If I did not know this, I would never have seen you again.

"But Harry . . . please, please understand! I understand your wandering, your hurting, almost your knowing of yourself and of me . . . in order to find breath you. Understand mine!"

"When?" "You mean, Fanny?"

"I am, love also. I am not . . . I do not want to be that perfect . . . emptiness you call your Christian wife. Loved, I am all warm for you, I am all giving for you, because I too have struggled and have wandered . . . in order to find breath."

"What do you mean?"

She stood close to him. "Look at me close, my love."

"What do you mean?" Very slowly, his pale white hands with their blue veins curled up like leaves in autumn, dry, drying: fists.

"Do you feel how I love you? Do you feel . . . O you must . . . how my love now, that was a little stupid childish thing, has bloomed: how it is full of blood, full of sustaining sweetness? Do you not feel, Harry, how you have come back to a love that will feed you, that will lift you up until the end of years?"

"Yes . . . I feel that. What do you mean?"

"That love is over the despair and death of our past years as a tree is over the ground."

"Fanny . . . I . . ."

". . . rooted in it. I was under the ground. That shows I loved you. Always, always. If I had not loved you, I should not have been so deep-

buried under the ground. I was dead. That shows I loved you. I am all open in the air, high to you. That shows I love you. Love for you has never stopped, it has grown."

"What do you mean . . ?"

"There was a thing that helped me to push up from my despair, from my death under the ground where you had buried me, Harry. There was a man. . ."

Harry Luvé stepped forward and viced her wrists: "A man —!"

"Harry dearest, you must let me now, me now tell you all about it."

He stopped her. "One thing only . . This man —" His voice broke. He dropped her wrists. His face was an ashen mist. "For God's sake, Fanny! You didn't . . you didn't, Fanny!"

His eyes saw her. Saw her face. Her face nodded.

His hands covered his face. He flinched away. He saw her not. He went back back . . the wall caught him. He crumpled to the floor. He lay under his white hands. Lay lor—

At last:

"Harry, Harry . . it was because I loved you. O the hurt! See, I have killed you too. Because I loved you . . I too needed to live, for you had killed me. Do not judge yet. Let me tell you, let me help us understand. I heard you . . your horrors, your orgies, your hells. O Harry, this was not so . . this was clean somehow . . leading to birth, to you. It was, since I am here now,

loving you . . ready to give you all, all of a life I have at last won to give you. O my boy. . .”

With each word she crept closer, sank nearer beside him. She knelt beside him. She sought his hands, his eyes . . his eyes. He saw her face hands eyes kneeling beside him who was crumpled beyond her. . . He saw not her face, not her hands. He saw white thighs, white, wide, very soft, very penetrable . . hers . . darkly penetrable; they were the stuff of his flesh, they were the stuff of his brain and they were pierced by some one! . . He saw rootflesh of a man . . *not he!* piercing the stuff of his brain.

He got up. Her face was still low where his face had been. Her face was near his feet. His feet touched her face.

“Our Lord has spoken,” he said, “and I throw no stone.”

She was very still, her face low above his feet. Listening with a firm stillness her body was hard and she held her face above his feet.

“Our Lord has spoken further! — ‘*But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife saving for the cause of fornication causeth her to commit adultery.*’ So has said our Lord.”

She was moveless.

“What do you mean?” she said.

“Rise up.”

“Let me here, dearest, try to tell you all. Try to tell you what I know now I must: how I was helpless, how I was poisoned dead . . how I was lifted up.”

“Get up.”

"O Harry, Harry . . I have killed you, too."

"Get up, I say."

She lifted her face, furrowed with tears, to his.

"I did not choose, Beloved, the Way I was saved . . ."

"Do you put that on God? or on Christ who has spoken against you?"

"When has He spoken against me?" Fanny Luve stood silently before him.

"He has spoken against you . . even He. He has said: Cast no stone. No stone shall be cast by me. He has said: Put her away . . ."

Her hands clenched under his mouth.

"—and I put you away."

"You put me away!"

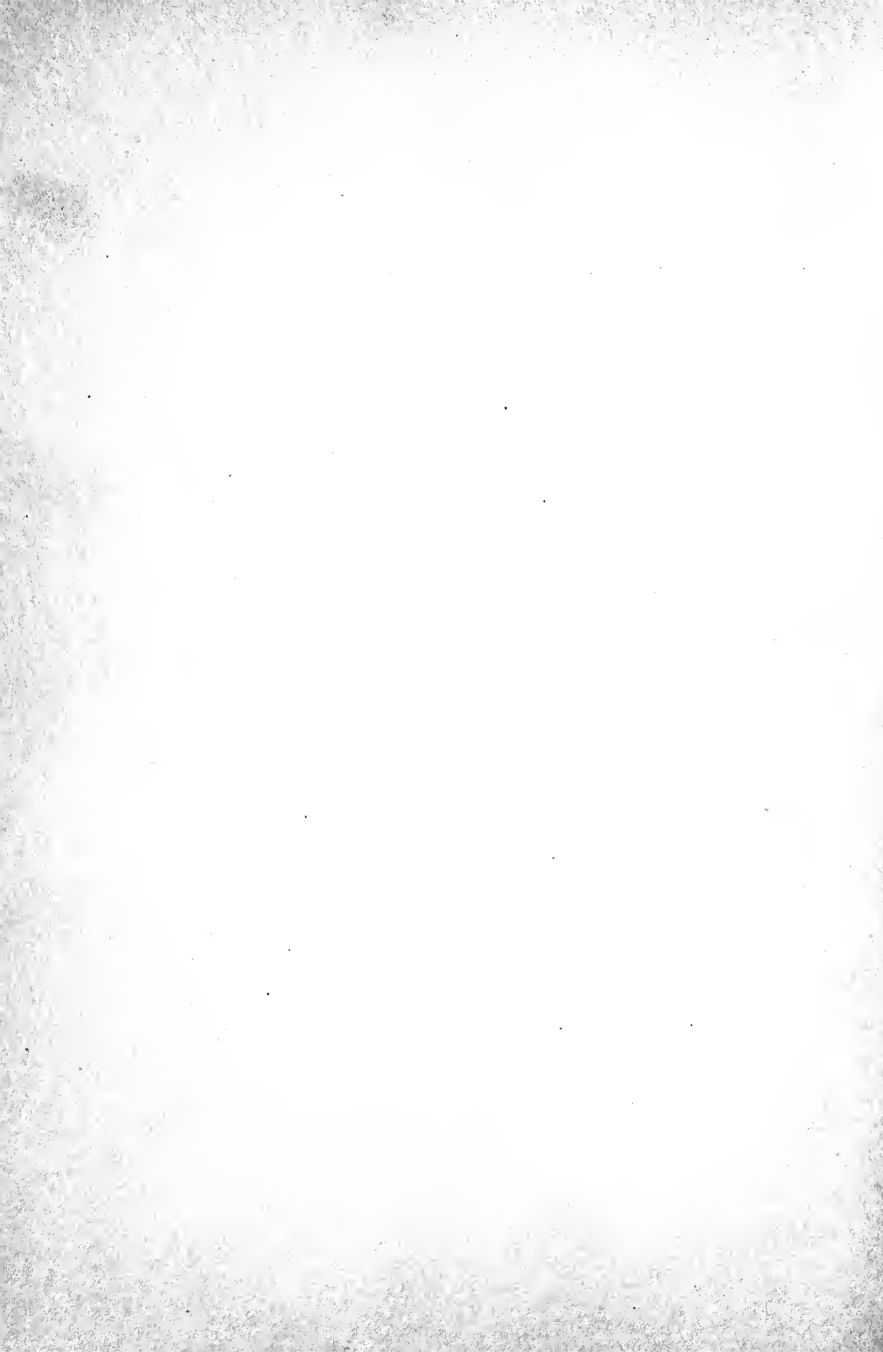
"I put you away . . Not for myself. I must travel. It is my mission to travel from College to College. I must be away much from my home, bringing where I can to my brothers the Word . . the Word of our Lord who puts you away. I put you away . . for the sake of my child."

"Whom you have never seen!"

"Whom you shall never see —"



THREE
WHITE SKY



FANNY DIRK LUVE stood on the Bridge where she could see the river up and down.

—I know what I am going to do. I know. Not die. Not going to see— What can I—? Since she knew, “Why! Why!” she said aloud.

She searched the world trying to find the anguish—I am not going to die! . . of what she was to do. —Why not? But she knew that. . . Not die. Not see her child. . . She saw the river.

The river came to her from trees. The city, a raised shadow near her eyes, pulled her eyelids down away from there beyond, where she lay once on her back. She lies on her back. Under: grass, roots thrusting in erection, spilling in bud. Over: he. . . From these trees came the river . . . from this past . . flowing like the dimension that was time upon her standing on the Bridge. Time and the river were one. It swept upon her from the past of trees, past of sweet love, thrust against her, surging resistless; it was going to overwhelm her. Where? Time and the river flung in a stroke eternally sure against her standing dry in anguish—love an edged steel—on the Bridge. She turned. It turned her. Time and the river sweeping from rootage and trees struck her now in the back. She saw where it flowed.

It flowed into flat land. A rugose strewing of rust and yard and factory was the flat land. The

city in the heights fell down from its proud mansions—through dawdling soiled cottages, through clustered shanties—fell to the flat land of rust and coal. Slow brackish river here, turmoiled . . full. It swirled in oil, it recoiled from the harsh thrusts of the makings of men—of junkyards. River and time stole through this newness of noise and filth away, in a filmy scarf of smoke-bitten locusts, beyond the eyes of Fanny. She felt in her back the subtle thrust of a beginning world of high-banked trees free in the air: how it fell, grew, now hurling through noise, dirt, misery—making, struggle to make!—to beyond her eyes that lay so wistfully against the dying locusts, unable to fall farther.

And at her side the city fell along. From its secluded shadow—warmed mansions fell with her along into a rising clatter of smoke, a foam of steel, huddling men moving. . . Mist.

Black-purple mist . . red rust . . the shriek of wheels crunching resistless against and upon steel lines thrust resistless also.

Fanny left the Bridge. . .

* * *

In one hand of Fanny was a valise. Her other hand was a fist.

Her mouth asking for a ticket shut fast. Her hand counting change shut fast. She sat in a train, shut.

The moving train worked at her, stole up in her, swayed, shook, pried her open. Her feet in the

opening rhythm of the train. Her legs. Her loins. Warm loins. Breasts, not so frozen, melting. Her head, erect on her frozen breast, now plunged in their melting. She sat in a train, open. . . She lay in a hot bath of her melted pain and life, flowing within it, open.

She had no sense of a world of objects—fragments to beat against her. She was all melted hot. She had a sense of the whole world . . whole worlds . . all . . falling. The train fell sure, it was sure of itself in its fall. It fell with the world it held so sure, so steadfast; it was a blessing so. She had the sense of the whole world falling in a stark cadence upward upon God. Tears, battle ecstasy of loss . . a falling somehow upward upon God.

Her hands gripped the plush arms, shrill sharp against the quick of her nails. The world was her world again, and was a delirious tangle of broken objects hurling against her eyes. She was bruised and aghast in the rain of broken objects of her world. But that which she had sensed in the melt of worlds remained. All fell upward . . let her pray!—can I dare? . . fell upward upon God.

—I am falling away. Grappling, crying, she saw at last how real was this falling away from the whole warm world of her sorrows and joys and wants. —*Edith, Harry, myself, O Edith my heart!* It is true. *Can I fall upward?* . .

The fast train seemed to be running over her life. It ran over an earth full of flying fragments. Over houses, fence snapping, cows dipped sudden into trees, pool flaring skyward, cloud-full, caught

in the porch of a house, road ribboning a tobacco-field, shaken straight, road stiff like a rod flashing away beneath her. —This is Virginia, this is I. The fast train running over her life smoothed it clear. . .

She could have remained and fought him for her child, she could not. She could have remained and won him . . repulsive . . she could not. She moved upon a track that was there she sensed before her moving upon it. But Edith! What sort of a life is this, moving away from Edith? The pain of her deprivation was a thousand pains, gray: a thousand gray birds circling her in mist. —I am suffering, suffering. Can I stand this? The mists cleared. She saw her Pain clear . . one Pain . . one moment. Pain. She saw that it was not a thousand pains, weeping in gray wings mistily about her. She saw that it was Life.

Life solid and salient.

—*What is this terror? What have I to do with this terror?*

You are within it!

. . Like this Virginia, an unbroken sweep, broken alone by the unwonted stress of the dimension of moving. One can face solid. One has two eyes and a mind for facing solid. . . She loved her daughter. —I love you, love you! More things she loved. Not Harry perhaps, O yes. . . the warm dreams she had born in Harry. The house around Edith. Clean beds, linen her own, the kitchen where she came each day and the apron she tied about her hips and the hips too she loved which arms must circle she was sure of. Edith's.

Home, daughter, man . . . why were they all destroyed?

—But they have never been.

What have they been? . . . pool of my blood
of dream.

Stagnant and dead: pool of my clotted blood.
My dream's blood flows!

It was true. Bleeding to death? Bleeding to birth? She did not know. But flowing.

“God, let me think!” The words came aloud.
—God, let me think! now silent. . .—Edith? Yes,
Edith was flowing alive. But Edith was not herself, not *her* blood flowing. Edith's blood flowing.
Let it flow for Edith.

Fanny sat shaken in a mother's storm. Help for her child. Could her child flow first alone? Where was the mother to help her? Father? Fanny sat trembling. She saw him, as he oldens in the cant moulds of his ideals Harry, pious, weak, stale . . . leading the life of her child. What did she have of her father?—If she is like her father let her rot! But now would she not surely be like him? She alone could save her child from that. *She alone could, who could not.* . . . The train ran. . . Fanny saw the Town, it would be the world of her child growing, of her child learning to live in the world. World of such women! Edith's blue eyes, open beneath the dimpled softness of her brows, behold a world of such women . . . the only world! Stiff brittle creatures, floating upon the viscid surface of a stream they have no weight to pierce. And their Laws: “Have no weight,

have no thrust that might pierce the viscid surface of our stream." World of such men! Liars, builders of lies, men taught to pray to Christ and to cheat their fellows, to cheat their women and wear them . . . trim them then wear them . . . taught to ignore half of the aching world that was black. —Let me go back to Edith! O let me go back! . . . The train ran smooth. —You may not.

Fanny faced the dead of her heart. She felt the world of her child clear, how it stank, how it swarmed like an evil stinking weed sucking the soil of God. She saw the blue eyes of her girl. They stood upon a body, white and clear like a flower: and all about, the Weed, swarming and purulent with its harsh roots sucking soil, with its hot leaves stealing sun. —What can I do? She faced she could do nothing. Yet reasonably something. Fight . . . persuade. There was reason with the cry of her mangled heart that there was much she could do. *Turn back.* The train, racing, swept her eyes upon a world lying folded in myriad skies, a world solid, a world one with space and stars . . . space solid joined her to the stars as her white body joined her eyes to her limbs. One. And Edith within it, flowing her way. Ruthlessly hers . . . —Let her blood flow for her.

Fanny facing the dead of her heart faced the life of failure. She knew at last she could live.

The train swam into a strewing of neat flat houses, cut across asphalt. A marble Dome in sun rose above smoke of roofs. Washington! . . . Leon's home. —I must change here. Every hour

New York trains every . . get there by day, though.

Fanny walked through a city incredibly neat. —Very fine. Government world. Fine and dead. It has not started to grow, it has not started to be. It is easy and fine, like a nonexistence.

Her feet were heavy as if she were walking in space.

“When, God,” she said aloud, “do I begin to think?”

* * *

She stood halted by a building. She knew which building it was. —He is inside! Of course perhaps he is inside no longer. It was a gray pile rising in numberless piddling columns to the white of the sky. It was cold. She looked at it. “I am not going in.”

He was perfect in her. Why should she go in to take from him perfection? She was afraid for his perfection. —How can he be this holy man in this grave? The Government Building stood like an insolent lackey fending her off. It glared at her and was very insecure and stupid within its ruffles of marble. It strutted its turrets before her like a vain proud bird. —He is perfect. He is done. He is no more. He is buried here. She felt a great need to see him.

She knew she must not. “I must seek you,” she whispered against the mounting marble, “differently.”

She walked and knew that Leon Dannenberg

who was in each of her steps, in each of her pangs, in each leap forward of her blood was forever beyond her eyes. —Here you are, holy man. Where am I? There you are.

She walked away. A vast openness was upon her flank, it ached sweetly as if her blood poured through it. An open longing lay upon her flesh as if she walked away from him who had given her birth. —You are behind. Not so far behind as Edith. Nearer, holy man. Farther ahead.

But as she walked the inept city, a scene came and it filled her. She gave herself her scene fully, voluptuously . . . starving . . . while the long buildings passed her in a squad of uniformed dull giants.

He is up from a wide desk. He says no word, looking deep in her eyes. One instant doubt as to the full free independence of her coming. Doubt goes before the intelligence of her eyes. He took her hands, very lightly, released them.

“I am going North. I am on my way North.”

“How can I help you?”

“You have helped me all you can.”

“He came back . . . you told him?”

She nodded.

.. “He did not understand?”

“How could we expect he should understand? Would I? Do I? . . . if this all was not mine . . . ?”

“It is good, Fanny Luve. Go ahead.”

His face sudden is like a field under a sky of

longing: a sun came down; his face glows in tender fear: it shadows to resolution.

"You must go North. We can't understand. I can see, you are going right."

"How can you see that, Leon?"

"No day since I left have you been far from me. You come into my thinking, my dreaming, into my sudden flying visions. You measure yourself always with them, with the best of them, Fanny. You measure full with them."

"What you have said I could have said."

His eyes came very near. They filled with tears of her. He looked away.

"But I am vague. O Leon, so blind!"

"You are no longer afraid of being blind. You are ready."

"*Leon. what am I going to be?*"

"We are no longer prophets . . . save in our lives. Live, Fanny.

"Leon, I could fight. . . I could win her, I could save her."

"No, Fanny . . . you are going to live."

"I . . . and Edith?"

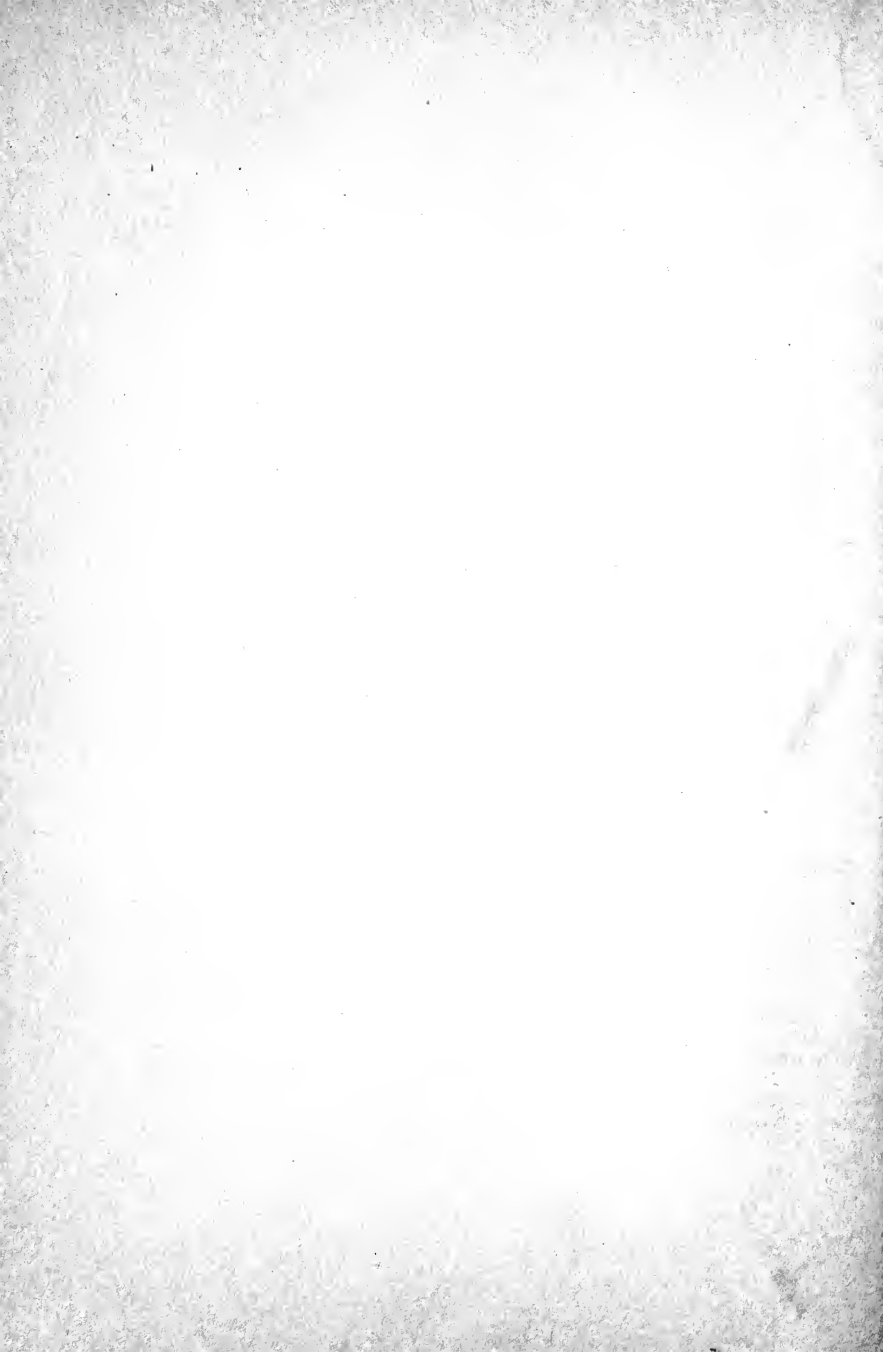
"*You . . .*"

She walked with mouth tear-brimmed and open out of her fancied words. She saw about her with relentless eyes, felt with relentless feet, this hard pavement, these hard houses, hard white sky. Out of the deep scene came now upon her, as her mouth shut, clearer and more solid than the stone city his last words:

"You, Fanny . . . not Edith, *you* . . . are to live."

Clear feet carried body erect through the stone city. Mother worlds in blood poured from her, leaving white feet, white body, while the soul of Fanny swooned in a ruthless knowledge.

FOUR
PAVEMENT OVER EARTH



A MAN and a woman walked this day with Autumn burning all about them. The sun lay in thin cloud. The trees burst.

"I have found out, Fanny," he said.

She was so shorter than he and her steps swifter than his long lurches. She felt him from his broad brown halfshoes upward . . . big fleshly man, somehow lithe, somehow gentle like song above his crude-rhythming feet. And his hairy great hands she felt—as when they were on her body like a little child's, so helpless yearning, so imperious.

"I knew I should find out if I gave myself the space to: that's why I brought you up here. We came yesterday. This morning I know . . . that I have known since the day you came into the Office asking for a job."

She laughed. —I can laugh!

"O I see your thought: 'That's the conventional phrase.' "

" . . . from Christopher Johns!"

"Maybe he's been so darn unconventional these forty years because he hadn't found himself. Maybe he feels, now he can look at last straight at you and himself and understand, it'd be good to be conventional: like rolling in warm blankets which the hard days' work has paid for."

She felt the dissonance of her feet striking the rutted road beside his.

"There must have been a frost last night."

“Look at that maple! It’s a blazing red, because there was a frost.”

She looked. He was keeping step.

“I mean it, Fanny. It’s nearly two years since I’ve known you . . . nearly two years you’ve worked for me . . . one year we’re—well—lovers though I fear the word for the rare wonder you have given me—why, why? But now it is a blossom of knowing, a whole Spring of knowing, woman! There has been Sylvia *Frau*, there has been Sadie. I chuck ’em both, and when it is done we marry.”

“Jonathan! I want you to walk quiet . . . miles and miles beside me quiet, today all day—do you understand? I am listening for something.”

She knew he would, clutching his stick behind him in two fists.

Two years . . . they tramped . . . two years . . .

—You are Fanny Dirk, Mrs. Luve. . . I’ll keep that name! And you have gotten tired already, tired of what if you look and face it you will find all bundled and labelled in two years. Labelled to know, Bundled . . . to throw out! That’s clear, though the facing, the training of my eyes and the opening of my mind to hold what I face, is going to be hard. . . Here is an autumn day and a dear man trudging so you are alone with it. Day of glory, day of flame, day of death. The leaves are singing for they are going to fall. The trees are singing for they are going to sleep. The world is a maze of trumpeting insects, loomed with flutters of dry grass, trill of seed, for soon comes snow stillness. O Fanny, once you were Spring-

time! I hear a man talk blossom and I feel September. The bundles . . the labels . . two years inventoried! Aren't you a business woman, Fanny, earning two thousand a year? A year . . two years. Each year has a Spring and a Fall. A third year might green if you burn away like these trees.

"It is simply," she whispered to herself, and the man watched her mouth: "do I want to green like these trees? . . When will I learn to think?"

She knew already what was to be.

She struggled only, she gave this full free day in the air only, to know Why. Did not the world have reasons? She had suffered losing two lives that grew within her flesh. She had asked Why, and in the questioning been rent away so even these agonies were dim: they were worlds dead like dim moons in the dawn of her adventure. And that adventure was Why!

—Why shall I say No very soon . . so very soon? Why am I going to leave the warm of this dear man, the ease, the goodness of it all—why am I going to push him back into new Emptiness?

She saw him that first day: his arms thrust out, nervous arms, haggard hands, hair wet . . *business man!* this big bumping child, bumping in Emptiness? Dear . . so good (she could see that at once as of a horse and a dog all in one, and his life a currycomb brushing wrong, a bone marrowless): now, back he goes into worse Emptiness. Why?

—Tell me trees. . .

I am not tired, I am rested.

In the arms of this man, with my face turned
away, I have rested.

I can bear what you tell me. . .

I am hard like you.

..That afternoon, the ninth of beating about on
pavement until pavement tumored upward
through her legs, her bowels, her blood, stiffened
her brain . . . that afternoon she had felt strong
again sudden. —So this is Business? this soft
flesh in the hard City?

“Mr. Johns, you must let me have that place,”
she told him very calmly.

The next day she hung her coat on the costumer
in the corner away from the open window. A grey
wall rose beyond eyes, shrill greenish white elec-
tric bulbs blazed, shutting them all together,
papers typewriter woman and desks and murmur
beyond: she found she wished to smile.

Solid New York! Solid New York relieved her
burden of no base. She had visited New York be-
fore: she felt the City deep, having in that past
surface of her life beheld its surface. She sensed
an analogue. She too had not changed but had
gone down below her surface to a turmoiled depth.
Within still deeper was there not a quiet, as now
she sensed the Quiet of the City under its torren-
tial streets and its human million midges of fire
through stone? Thus New York welcomed her:
it was a place where people dwelt and had dwelt
long, so she could feel it was a place where people
dwelt. Her Southern City, . . . almost as old, was
dead where old, was raw and unaccustomed where

it was new . . its industrial heart of smoke, its outskirts of prim bungalows. Here was a City *one*: the place she knew for such as she to come to.

—Such as I?

Loving New York so sudden above the agony of her intimate deprivals, she said: “We are something in common, you and I.” She and the wide solid City that untouched her frail and bloody inwardness . . lifting her up to a light where she could seek what this thing meant, this I.

In the Office was Clara Lonergan.

When she spoke to persons, particularly when she spoke to Clara, Fanny lost her quiet City: New York became a pullulent pile, a heaving surface above a boil of blood. So Fanny did not seek out persons, she feared that City. —Do I not need to seek myself? She feared the self that was like it. But Clara, she knew at once, she was not to avoid.

She saw in a glance that she was supposed to remove her hat. She took a seat demurely, her heart compressed and moving up and down as she breathed fragilely. She felt how all within her was fragile and was surrounded by a solid world. Miss Lonergan smiled:

“I guess Mr. Johns will see about you pretty soon,” and went into his Office. Her smile alone of the outside world also was fragile.

So Fanny sat demurely. Beyond her was a long dark room filling with girls. She heard their foot-falls in the hall: at times through the wired glass of the door she caught faces . . face sallow hun-

gry, face angrily uplifted toward sun and laughter by the means of rouge, face resigned in sweet debility . . . That one will marry. As feet cadenced the hard cement Fanny's heart fluttered. The door swung; voices angled against the feet and the door, escaping in this brief interim of home and work in allusive herd-calls: Fanny felt thrust away. Each voice and football thrust her. She struggled to be back.

—I am of you, now, she argued to herself. A little older than most. O in life so older! . . . But I am one of you now.

The door opening from the private Office called her sharp up. Miss Lonergan came in, seated herself with fingers already rustling at her pad. Mr. Johns loomed before her.

“Good morning. Good morning.”

He stood with his feet apart and his toes turned out. Fanny observed how his knees flexed inward, how his legs aburst in their drab trowsers flexed and gave her mind the same thought as his ruffled hands and hair: made her smile.

“Well now,” he was saying, “you two said anything yet to each other? get acquainted yet? no explanations?” He turned from the one woman to the other. “You’ll be friends. O all of us’ll be friends. What could be more companionable after all than to engage in the business of soft drinks . . . making Delight Drinks for the thirsty people . . .”

Miss Lonergan struck a key of her machine. *Click*, she smiled. —I can’t wait for your nonsense. *Click clicket click*. . .

“You see,” went on Mr. Johns, “the people get hot and what cools em off is ice. But they wont pay for ice. Not much! Ice is ice . . nameless. We don’t furnish ice. They pay for our lovely game of names,” he handed Fanny a list. “So we send the names in the liquid forms, to the candy men and the soda men: and *they* put in the ice: and the ice cools the people: and the people pay us.”

He flourished clumsily. His face glowed open about his clear blue eyes. “Will you come, Mrs. Luve?” His head serious now thrust back. “I want to show you the girls you are here to take care of.”

* * *

“Why I live on Twenty First Street. That’s right near.”

“Let’s walk,” said Clara.

New York was open letting the calm day in. An afternoon of May . . made of the scent of far young grass, the swayings of far trees, the slopings of far hills . . lay above the streets where Fanny and Clara walked: came down, feathery certain into the open City, into their eyes and limbs. They walked languorous through a sleepy city lying like a brittle-kneed woman under the loved day. The City glowed with half responses . . new. The angle of a street falling away from the straight street where they walked was a gesture of pleasaunce. Above the clotted people the dim houses leaned gently together, making a haze of

memory above the urgency of people. The streets turned angles leisurely: a Square beyond them was an invitation like a hand open or a mouth relaxed, the swerve of the Elevated train on the near Bowery was a stroke that caressed.

"You are from the South, I can hear that. Have you been here long?"

"About a month," said Fanny.

"I was born here. I wonder what it's like, coming to New York."

"New York is easy to come to."

"Do people come here happy?"

Fanny did not want to look at Clara. The day was lazy and round, falling into night. "Why do you ask that?" she said.

"O I dont know . . I was just wondering—why do they come to New York."

"Why did your parents come?"

"My father's family was starving in Wicklow. Pa was a boy and no use at home ploughing more fields for a grabbing landlord. So he came. He wasn't happy coming. Mother I dont remember very well, she came from a place near Pressberg in Bohemia. She was so lovely always . . tall and so sweet . . and always so tired. I guess they were all just tired—her whole family came—they couldnt keep still. I've been tired that way. I'd keep moving and moving. I'd say to myself; Now Clara if you'll just try and stop and *sit down* you'll be better. I couldnt. Something like that I've felt in all the foreigners. . . Czechs and Dagos and Bohunks. . . I have ever seen. Something in 'em I guess got too tired to hold on, to

stay on, they had to move . . and there's America all ready, a chute like in the cowpens I've seen over in Brooklyn ready to swallow 'em up as they come tumblin'. Heaven knows where those foreigners get their idea of us."

She was taller than Fanny, slimmer. —She can't be more than eighteen. Fanny's heart went out, clamorous, sudden . . stopped against a strength and a maturity she felt. With her heart's warmth she saw this girl.

Saw sharp against the day's languor the long face, clear dark, with narrowing thrust chin from the full mouth, cheeks high and delicate, brow faintly curving and sheer beneath the black hair. Saw in the soft fabric of her waist nervous elbows thrusting outward always as she walked, against air, against world. Saw the whole taut tender body in a world less clear, ever less fair than her dark freshness. Saw at last as they stopped: "Well I go here. See you tomorrow" . . eyes very black very large, dry and within themselves like windows of some hidden world having no faith in the sun.

—I have lost what you have not yet begun to make. Yet my hand is softer than yours! Fanny knew it was a thing which must change: that her hand was softer. She walked the swirling Spring-drunk dusty streets with thoughts of this girl and her hand.

* * *

She had a room which she had come to love. It

was upstairs in the back of an old red brick house: it was oblong, square-buttressed by its honest doors painted white, its two wide windows and its low grey ceiling. She had spent eight dollars to remove the acid-red carnations blotching a sea of green bars on the walls . . . ("I want you to scrape first, not paper over it") . . . then clad her room in a dull buff. The walls were bare. The landlady grumblingly took out the wide iron bed, leaving her a couch. The carved oak table, the bastard Empire chairs were distributed to the rest of the lodgers and replaced by plain ones from the storeroom. She took off her hat, let down her hair, put slippers on her feet and drew a chair to the wind. The day was more darkly textured but still clear. An ailanthus flaunting half naked through its tinselly leaves thrust above fence and tessellate brick walls between her and the grey rear of a Church. Beside the Church, a small house receded, built of the same dim sooty stone. On Sundays, the sun vaulted the cluttered roofs at just about the time that a hymn, many-voiced, shone through the corner of the stained-glass window which she could glimpse on the protruding side. There was a little grass plot. It was littered with dust and ash bits, fluffs of drifting textile: but now sod pushed bravely up in a dim green. On the high fence at the side away from the Church, among clusters like sunrays of iron spikes, clothes-lines were drawn. A servant was busy taking in the wash.

The girl's arms reached up, loosed clothes-pins, dropped her armsfull in a basket. The girl's arms

reached up. . . Fanny lost herself in the dull catatony. She was tired. She held her eyes beyond her. Dimly behind she felt a world she did not wish to turn to: world where there were wash-lines and a girl her own. . . Industrious, this girl. A young man stepped from the kitchen door of the house. The girl's arms, full of tableclothes, suspended against her breast. He spoke to her, she nodded: disposed her burden. She was bent before him, he leaned down and kissed her. He stepped back, his arms and hands and shoulders, his feet and hips throwing out little splintery signals of his panic. He wore the cloth of the Church. Then the girl straightened, lifted her hands to her broad hips and smiled. The little curate's splintering commotion melted. He kissed her again. They went together into the kitchen.

Fanny sat very still. She felt that the muscles of her throat and legs and chest were tense, holding her still.

—What is the matter?

The world dim behind her eyes bellied out . . . swallowed the cool grey scene before her of a backyard, a flirting servant and a Church. A Church! Fanny swung around in her chair. She was circled now by a world no longer dim. She asked no question. Like one dropped sudden into a sea, she swam.

She swam to get out. Not yet . . . some day . . . she must swim in the other direction, away from shore, away from shore . . . swim, swim till she sank. But something within her told her she was not ready. This dullness upon her mind, this

fog fending her heart that was there since the month she was gone: let it be there longer. Was it beginning to part?

—Why am I here? I am afraid to ask why I am here. Solid New York, bear me up! Longer, your cold surface, lift me, hold me!

She swam to get out. She was up from her chair. Humming a tune she did not hear or know of, she lighted the gas: she clasped her short thick hair and thrust it atop her head. The gas danced hard on her eyes and her black hair. She lighted her little stove: she put water to boil: she was very busy swimming to get out.

And when she had drunk two coddled eggs and eaten an orange, she took the blue cover from her couch, folded it carefully away, threw wide her windows: and with the light of the downtown heavens falling in sprays and fluffs of murmurous gold against her sombre carpet, she lay down. Soon she slept.

* * *

Work gripped her. Mr. Johns was delighted with her way of work.

“Dont kill yourself, Mrs. Luve.”

She smiled wistfully. “I shant die.”

He looked at her warmly. “You say that as if you knew.”

“I know.”

“Perhaps you dont know the deadliness of New York.”

"I'm not ready yet," she announced half to herself.

"You're a bad example," he caressed her with bluff words, "of Southern indolence."

"I'm a New Yorker," she said and went back to her girls.

Always she knew this could not last. Yet always life came easier, easier . . . in its harsh brusque work, in its biting flavor of intercourse with Mr. Johns, with Clara.

Each night as she lay down to sleep, the question stood before her: Why? A question like a single point of steel piercing so many lives, piercing so many loves, all bleeding-spitted upon it. But she slept quick. She slept heavy. In her sleep, if it was parted at all, merely the Question again, rising up, up, out of sight like an infinite steel point: she was impaled on it: but bloodless already. She lay there quiet, impaled. She had no responsibility since she was bloodless already. And in the morning, when she awoke there was work.

She entered the Office a breath of wistful quiet, a cloud of gentle moisture moving upon a sultry day. All who were there unthinking were glad, when she entered the Office.

Clara found herself glad when she was with her. In the cooling dusk of summer they walked homeward: at times they dined together: quiet words went from each to each, no depths articulate and yet there was a peace.

Fanny looked at her friend as they ate in silence.

—Know everything! There is naught in me I do not wish you to know. But know it silent. She would have been happy to be of help to Clara.

Summer was a full time in the Sales Office of *Delight Drinks Inc.* Even so there came pause. Slack hours lounged in the hot rooms. Rooms, writhed in the dry green blare of the electric lights, burning like sores against the summer's sultry and drab dampness, came to a halt, jolted against their usual flow, stood glazed and ominous upon the dark grain of Time.

As in a crowded car suddenly broken from its speed the passengers congest, fall huddled upon each other, so Fanny's girls piled heavy moist against the soul of Fanny. She sat at her desk with her hands laid before her. The girls at long tables opened the envelopes of orders, marked blanks and sheets, sorted by geographical location, placed in trays. The girls yawned together . . . sudden the girls were One, with moist throat running down in dusty waist, with bare arm brushing sweat from brow, with body crowded lush in a narrow skirt, under narrow table, into narrow shoes. They were a body breathing and sweating in a smoulder of will to lie out naked near a lapping sea under cool winds . . . cool lips. She loved the girls.

—O if I could show you how I understand!

—Why do I understand?

Here with these girls, her life could come and she face it. Question no longer. Her life was a way, here, tender and passionate and simple, leading into the hearts of a dozen girls.

—I am all open. You do not come in.

I am all open. I come into you.

“It’s a hot afternoon, girls.”

“Gee . . . yes!”

“What do you say to a round of lemonade?”

Surface of scared wills against a whirling world. But here all was quiet and sweet, and all was in herself. She could look at each girl, see a face already bitten and shrunk by the acids of life. But she looked in herself, and each hurt, each struggle was a throb within her . . . they were healed.

“Good! You, Daisie, you know that Italian’s on the corner? Let’s collect five cents each—only those who want it though! You go out, dear, and bring up a pitcher . . . two pitchers.” As Daisie bustled by, she slipped a quarter holding the little calloused hand just long enough to give two messages: “Buy some cookies or something with that” and her heart’s fullness.

—What do I understand? now she asked herself as the room waited, spinning in expectancy, released in laughter and jest and stretching of arms from Time.

—There is something beautiful . . . in the understanding? in what? O life how you hurt! O life, how when one holds you warm and athrob in one’s heart, you are good, hurting!

The lemonade came: giggles and smacking lips softened the blare of the lights. “One can live,” Fanny murmured sipping her sweet drink, . . . “without questions.” The room went its way up Time’s black tunnel. The girls’ congestion broke.

They were one and one and one. They were many girls, now, some sweet, some bitter, some bright, some dull, some brave, some ugly and broken. They were many girls at work: they opened envelopes, marked blanks and sheets, sorted and marked . . . they droned in many minds about little shut circles of thought, each shut from the other circles: circles spun about their many heads, colliding, rebounding, spinning away alone. . .

—One can live without asking questions. Not you. One can live spinning and droning. Not you. One can weave a steel sheet between one's heart and one's mind. Not you. Lord, I shall think. I promise, Lord. . . I shall remember that I have suffered and died, that I am here, to think. . . Lord, just a little longer.

Fanny walked home alone, avoiding Clara. In the dim afternoon the City was solid. Houses were made of stone and brick and were held up in their vast weights by pavements.

Pavements solid strong, hold me up also.

You hold these crowds, you hold these walls.

Solid City, do not let me fall.

Fanny walked tense through the slack afternoon, helping to hold herself. Her trip from the South was there. She runs swift, relaxed, through the world. She falls through the world in a train, falls upward. She falls upward upon God. *Hold me, City.*

In her room, the Church. Her fists clenched.

"I am going to move," she muttered, her breath was angry. She hated . . she hated. "Damn that Church! it blots out most of the sun."

Down she went, deliberate, to the kitchen. Old Mrs. Deemis bent rhythmically over a padded board ironing towels.

"Hot, eh? Mrs. Luve."

"Yes."

"Anything I kin do for you, dearie?" the woman filled the pause. Her gray hair fell in wet patches over her wide bland forehead. "Never you hesitate if there's anything I kin do for ye, now."

Fanny, quailing before her sudden resolve to give notice, sat in a chair.

"You couldn't remove that Church for me, could you, Mrs. Deemis?"

Mrs. Deemis stamped the steaming iron with elbows right-angled to the board.

"Now, will you believes me, Mrs. Luve, I wisht I could!"

Fanny tried to laugh. —Haven't I been joking?

"You mean Saint— acrost the way there, don't you? They own this house, and they're the meanest landlords . . the downright stingiest, meanest landlords, now, you ever seen. I been here twenty years. On the first of the month, it's the rent quick, you bet. But if it's the roof that leaks, or the plumbin' that stinks—O any year'll do for fixin' that."

"This is Church property," murmured Fanny.

"Yes . . *this* . . ." Mrs. Deemis flourished the dismal kitchen with its seeping walls, its

crumbling plaster ceiling, its ooze rotted floor, into the eyes of Fanny.

"How can I live on Church property," Fanny thought aloud.

"Why! . . Mrs. Luve!" Mrs. Deemis doubted her ears. "What'd ye say? Beg pardon?"

"They're rotten landlords?"

"Well now . . of course. . . I dont say they're no *worse*. . . "

"The Church takes the sun from my window, Mrs. Deemis. I love the sun."

"Why you aint never there? You work. What do ye need the sun for? . . Dont blame the Church for that, my dear. You must be fair. If 'twasnt the Church wouldn't it be one of these here . . now . . factories or office-buildings?"

" — taking the sun," murmured Fanny and saw the once more ploughing arms of the old lady.

"You aint thinkin' of leaving, Mrs. Luve? Cause . . that's a fine room . . kin rent—— "

"Why no." Fanny got up. "No, I shant move. I love my room. But if you could be so obliging as to remove that Church . . " She laughed with her eyes gleaming differently from laughter.

Upstairs she lowered the shades. She undressed. Naked, she saw in the glass that she still wore her hat. Her brow ached. She let fall her hair, letting her cold hands run through its electric dusk. Ungowned in her sheet she lay through the thick night with hands clasping her arms beneath her breasts. She lay dreamless, moving very fast. When she awoke it was late and she

knew she had gone far. There were red furrows deep in the flesh of her arms.

The night following . . sudden she emerged from the hot fog that held her. She is in the Church. Naked she stands before a stately mirror whose gold-tooled pediment crowned the blaze of her black hair and eyes. She struck her breasts with a firm fist. "You are cast out, you are vomited by Love." She stands there burning in cold shame. Her mouth is open, and from it, like a white water, runs a moan. "What does it mean? Christ, what does it mean? Why was I hurt so? Why was I so given a high thought, high dream? I have been hurt. O Christ how it hurts so to be hurt without a meaning. Why?"

—*This is a Church!* She knew that Christ was coming. He was a man whom she knew. She could not see him, standing there beyond her: but each nerve of her lay in the impact of his presence. —He sees me! It was right that he should look upon her naked and shamed. —It is good, it is good. He looks on me and that is good. He looks on me because my hurt is an unmeaning hurt. . .

Her half-opened eyes, her half-shut hands, her outstretched knees and her thighs touched the warm smoothness of her bedclothes. —I am so tired! It was good in bed. She slept.

She walked downtown in the young summer morning. The air had a coolness like lilacs after rain. A man passed. Coming closer, sheer, the sight of the man tugged on the cheek and on the neck of Fanny. A man old and bent. Grey beard tangled from a face long furrowed: the eyes were

blue and gentle and the brow was untouched. . . His beard was a grey prayer. His face was his life. Above his life was his brow like a dawn above storm. "He was a Jew," she whispered to herself. Then she remembered her dreaming and her moan.

* * *

. . Something within her said: "There is no hurry." Much within her said: "You have no life, you are broken. Why alive? You are broken and flayed by life. Life without what you have lost is a mere agony dying down, a slow starving, a slow suffocation." But something within her said: "There is no hurry."

Something within her stirred to say: "Even your hurt has a soul. Even the insult lying in your heart has a soul." Then her hands worked faster. She had eyes then for her girls toiling in their mute slavery, that brought out love, like a cool mist rising from a morning sun, into the dismal workroom.

At times, eating her meat and enjoying it, laughing alone at a show, she found in herself assurance . . mad and blind howsoever . . like a babe's lying within a womb.

She asked herself doubtingly: "You have been unhappier having, than now when you are empty. Perhaps I am dead!"

Each thought and pain, pushing forth from her, could not leave the mist of her strange slumber. So that she could not be unhappy. For unhappi-

ness is the departure of ourselves from ourselves, the adventure beyond us of our hearts and eyes. Fanny was caught in her pregnant slumber. Her consciousness was like a maze of creatures crawling about a Sphere who cannot leave its surface: who cannot conceive of aught within or without its surface: creatures of two dimensions spanning a Globe about and about . . . and yet unable to know it.

* * *

It had been hot, this day: now late, sultry clouds pressed like steel on the pulsant City. Dust rose in a great wind. The Office seemed to plunge through a sea of dust and steel cloud.

The others were gone: in the suddenly dark room, Fanny worked alone with Mr. Johns. He examined her books, leaning over her, just above her shoulder, breathing palpably there in the dark room.

A gust of wind from the gray window scattered a pile of papers, Johns' hand came flat on the table.

"It's going to rain," he said.

"Yes."

He strode to the window and shut it.

"That wont be too hot? All these papers will blow, I'm afraid."

"It's cooler, already."

It was not cooler. The shut window made the dark room plunge and stifle. Fanny felt ill. Her hands ran over the sharp cool sheets of paper.

The nerves of the palms of her hands were shrill.

"Is that all, Mr. Johns?"

"There's the whole South yet! We'd better see how they're drinking down in the South."

"O yes . . ."

"You wouldn't forget the South?"

A picture bright like a knife . . . this her house, the garden, Edith in her blue bassinette . . . cut her and filled the room.

—Get away! get away!

"Now—first, Virginia—"

"Yes." —Get away! O my baby! O Harry! How could you? Couldn't you understand? Yet? Where are you Edith? . . . "This was at Flora's table." —Get away!

She talked. Her words were dim, she could not see her words. She went on talking . . . strong hands gripped her arms near her shoulders, turned her. A long heavy face—red and kind—thrust bewilderment upon her eyes that could not see her words.

"Mrs. Luve!"

—Your face is different: heavier, solider . . . could it hurt so?

"Mrs. Luve!"

—Your hair is not silky. Silk cuts. Silk cuts.

"Mrs. Luve! what is the matter?"

He placed her in a chair. The window flew open. Steel cool night flooded in. The room righted.

"Excuse me, Mr. Johns . . . I—I reckon I—I was faint a bit. Let's go on."

"There's no hurry."

—He's looking at me. And I can't see my

words. I am talking. I must talk. Do my words stand between me and him? O they must . . Silk only cuts . . She stopped.

Her heart was weary. —If you must see, you big good man, then see. I can fend no more. I let go. She covered her face one moment with her hands. No tears. Her head lifted, eyes blazing.

“Well,” she said, “have you seen enough? Have you had enough! Coward!”

A heavy hand lay gently upon hers. Gentle hand outstretched from a long arm . . O how long! and there, vastly beyond as in a dream, this man: solid red good.

“Quiet,” his hand spoke to her. The other hand. “Quiet.” Fanny jumped up.

She saw him there, and that he was frightened.

—He is frightened by me, he is frightened about me! He cares because he sees me in pain. He is worried about me. Impossible, impossible. Right this!

Fanny’s scream knifed through the grayness. Then she was clear. She stood there, seeing him in the dark room, clear.

He saw her clarity: his brow clouded.

“I don’t understand,” he said. “I thought you were sick: you seemed hysterical, Mrs. Luve. I meant only to quiet you.”

“Your hand you mean? It was good. Thank you for your hand, sir. It took one scream from me. Thank you.”

She breathed very fast. She was headclear now, as if in a storm which had passed all fibre,

all flesh had been stripped from her taut nerves. She was a framework of nerves.

"Thank you," she said again. "One less scream. Do you know what that means? One less scream!"

He came to her and clasped her arm.

"Scream again."

She looked at him full. "Wait," she panted. He held her. She leaned back feeling his hands strained by her weight to eat into her arms.

"Wait!" There was a liquid fullness in her voice. "Perhaps I can laugh instead. Laugh—"

"No. Don't laugh, I tell you. Don't lie, for God's sake. Scream."

There was a silence. The silence was all fresh and new like a dawn.

Gently she pressed from him. She sat by the table at the room's far side. She buried her face in her hands on the cluttered table. She wept. . . .

She wept long. She stayed still motionless there, with her face buried among papers after she had wept. The world came back:— The dusk of the spent day. The long cool wake of the spent heat-storm. The little office, pitching no longer . . . spent . . . atop the cluttered City. And this man, stranger she had worked for now many months, who was solid and could help . . . this man so good that he had made her scream.

With a felt slowness she lifted her head, turned her face.

—He is there! He has not moved. He stands there silent, held by the sight of me . . . while I wept.

She smiled at him.

"Do you feel better now?"

She nodded.

"Sure?"

She nodded. He brought her coat and hat. An orange feather tufted from the straw. His long vein-straggled hand ran over the feather. She looked at it. The feather was not ruffled.

"Thank you," she said very soft.

His face was rounder with a smile. She saw his jagged teeth and his soft twining lips. She saw the dimple in his chin and his long neck. —Ostrich! She was alert, serious as he helped her. She felt him . . good . . with her back . . all about her . . as he helped her.

—He is sure! While I wept, he was there, not moving!

The hand she held out to his seemed small to her, pretty. . . .

There was a knock on Fanny's door.

"It's me, Mrs. Luve."

"O Mrs. Deemis. Come in. ."

She was almost dressed. The old lady gave a glance that was like a draught of drink at the whole room . . her room, changed so often into new mystery of him or her who hired it. She lived familiarly in mystery. It warmed her. She had no man, her children were gone: she had a family of mystery. She did not know but on these she subsisted.

“There was a phone call for you . . early . . your office. A Mr. Johns—he didn’t give no other name—he said as how if you wasn’t feeling well this morning you should knock off. It’d be alright. Are you sick, dearie?”

“No.” Restless before her mirror. —What should I do here, workless? “Yesterday afternoon a little . . The New York heat, I reckon.”

“I guess so. Well,” the old lady opened the door, “Take the chancet when it’s offered. Eh?” She was a silent woman for she was full of her mysteries. She left. Fanny went on dressing.

But there came a morning in the clear coolness of autumn. Fanny’s eyes opened from sleep. Her body stretched on its back . . the warm thin bed . . her body less plump already measuring the bed . . the bed measuring the wall, soft cream . . the room . . windows behind their white mesh curtains thresholding, flaring, shouting out into the world, all new and terrible again in its old Pain . . came to her. Different! She lay. She could lie, eyes open, and the windows flared and led out, and there was the Pain of the congested world: yet she lay warm, stretched in her bed, and could bear it.

—It’s Sunday. O how good! It was long, back in the age that was separate by the Abyss, since she had lain awake in a sweet bed. —Why?

—There’s been a hairy monster sitting on my face!

The hair in my eyes, the fat and the stink and
the bag
Glued on my mouth! . .

Here was a clear gold morning, full of sun . .
a morning mad to drink . . —*He squats there yet!*
Gold mornings made to drink, clear cool drinkable
days. I'll drink you yet, I'll drink you yet. Sun-
veined air, wine of the sun, I'll have you!

—Find out the monster's name: pull him, tweak
him.

Find out his name and he'll squeal away like
a pig.

—O he is there. But I have sipped a morning.

She got out of bed . . dimness before her eyes
and brow like a curtain before fire. The curtain
became mist. She knew so yet it must be . . the
mist quenched and quenched. *Not all the fire!*
Never all the fire! In this way she got out of bed.

In her nightgown she stood by the open win-
dow, letting the cold air race through her. She
looked at the Church, she did not feel the cold
air save that there was sun in it. The Church
did not race. It stayed there immovable. It was
fixed somewhere under the spinning of her world
. . where the Pain was also. Half naked by the
open window and the Church, she took her Bible
and opened it. She felt the Church a dull base
on which the Bible was written: from which it
leaped, it leaped in syllables of sun.

“When the morning stars sang together, and
all the sons of God
Shouted for joy . . .”

She turned the pages. She saw:

“For I say unto you,
Whosoever shall put away his wife saving for
the cause
Of fornication causeth her
To commit adultery.”

She shut the book. She looked at the Church. She looked at the Church, the morning stars sang through her flimsy nightgown. But she was not cold. She wondered.

She went back into bed, holding the Bible. Two fingers marked the two places she had read. Her eyes narrowed. —I am beginning to think! Once more she jumped up. She turned the curtains back so that the windows were bare. She went again to her bed. She could see the Church now from her pillow. She pressed the little black book against her breasts. “Where,” she said aloud, “in which of the two places does it touch me?” She pressed the Bible against her left breast and against her right breast. She liked the feel of the hard book against her. . . . “What sucks me?” she whispered. “. . . that which has cast me out, or the other that draws, that welcomes?” She lifted her two hands high above her face. “Yes” she cried, “the other that calls me good!” Her hands fell in her bosom. —*I am beginning to think. Do*

words in sunlight leap from a page and leave it? She turned her head, gazed at the wall of the Church so heavy and fixed against the sun-dazzled window. The organ rose. A hymn, many-voiced, twined with the organ, pealed slanting upwards toward her through the window. —It leaves the Church. Comes to me. I hear it as no one . . . don't I know? . . . as none of them sticking in their varnished pews. *I* hear alone. Out of a Church. She took the Bible again and read the words of Jesus.

She read them calmly. She looked away seeing the terrible words. Pain, agony of shame and of deprivation, rending of doubt parted once more the golden haze she had lived in for a moment. —I am sinking back! She was afraid. —I am sinking. There it was all . . . Harry, her search to hold, to find him: the lancing anguish of her revelation: Leon, Edith, the ecstasy of Good . . . and the cool-lipped stranger so close pointing a finger, thrusting her out with a finger.

Fanny rocked in her bed, rocked motionless, dizzy with rocking thoughts. —Go away, go away, she moaned. —Why, why must I ask Why? I cannot bear it.

There was a knock on her door. She was very still. Knock, knock.

“What is it?”

“May I come in? . . . It's Clara Lonergan . . .”

“O you . . . Yes. Come in.”

The girl smiled: “It's such a bully morning.”

“I am glad you came.”

"I had no idea you'd be so lazy. I thought you might come for a walk."

"The day came into the room. I have both day and bed."

Clara brought a chair to the bed and sat down. She saw the Bible.

"And Church too, I see." Her lips curled but her eyes were really smiling.

"Don't you approve of Church?"

"No," said Clara, "I hate it. *My* Church at any rate. Pa said it was the Priests that made Mother willing to die."

"Well . . what have Church and Bible to do with each other?"

Clara laughed. "O come on! Let's walk. It's cold in here." She drew her boa across her throat. "Shall I close the window?"

"Don't you dare!" cried Fanny. She jumped out of bed. She was exhilarated. Her nightgown fell to the floor.

Clara was up. "You'll catch your death of cold . . ."

"No, no," said Fanny. She stood there naked. Her arms were lifted above her. "I'm not cold. There are stars and sun in this room . . they are racing through me."

"You're mad, dear," said Clara. She was close. She placed her hands on the naked woman's shoulders. Their eyes met. Clara's eyes and face went down. Very lightly she touched her lips upon the throat of Fanny.

"Dress . . Hurry." Clara went back to her chair; half-turned away she fingered the fallen

Bible. There was a new warm glow between them in the room.

Fanny dressed silent, fast.

"Why do you want to move about?" She seated herself in her wrapper before Clara on the bed. "I don't feel like walking. I'll close the windows. I'll make the bed in a jiffy. You stay."

"Go and make yourself some coffee. I'll fix the couch."

"I'll make coffee for two."

"Alright."

They sat at last, quiet in the clear sunlit room, and smiled at each other. Sleep and the night were gone, with the bed turned couch.

"Now it's my sitting room," laughed Fanny.

"You've been used to more than that."

"Please don't!" Then Fanny was sorry. "No I don't mean that. I don't mean to hide myself from you, Clara. Only, it hurts."

"You don't have to talk . . with me. I'm not that sort. I'm not the sort of girl who measures a friendship by the number of secrets chattered about."

"I know."

"I feel we're friends, you and I. That's enough."

"That's enough. But O, Clara, if I knew a single thing in all the world, I'd tell you. I don't know anything. Perhaps you know more than I."

"I know some things," said Clara.

"I feel you know some things," Fanny looked at her friend's long taut hands. They reached

for her bag, opened it, took out a box of cigarettes. She offered it, open, to Fanny. "Go ahead." They both smoked.

"I know that a smoke tastes good," said Clara. "I know that in the mornings a cup of coffee tastes good. I know I'm young and that the world won't give me a thing . . . not a thing! . . . unless I fight, unless I cheat."

"What has it to give?"

"Just things that taste good . . ."

"Then . . .?"

"Then let's die."

"Why do you say Cheat, Clara? Why don't you say Pay?"

"To pay comes high."

"To cheat comes low." She looked at Clara long. "I don't believe you, Clara. There's no cheat in you."

"Then you don't know me."

"You said that we knew each other."

"Well, look at me!" She stood. "I am lovely. Look." Her hands caressingly followed her words. "My hair is black and soft. My mouth is warm. This is a good white throat, I know . . . And my body is good—O so good and clean, and so swelling-slender like a lily. My body deserves something, that is sure." She sat down. She blushed. "So does yours," she went on. "I've seen you. So does yours."

Fanny's hands clasped swaying. "If you could see, O girl, if you could see what has been done upon my body!"

She looked away with her hands still swaying

. . The Church! She did not know where to look. She hid her eyes in her hands.

Clara got up. She lifted the face of her friend and held it between her palms.

"I can see much, Fanny. Don't say a word. I can see much."

Her hands slipped down. They were fists. Slow, the cigarette smoke, closed them, sat down.

Soon she left. . . .

Fanny Dirk opened the windows wide, let out the cigarette smoke, closed them sat down.

—Who is right,
Jesus or God?

—What do I know of Jesus, what does Harry know? There is a meaning that is God's in the words of Christ, and I can't find it out. Who knows it? Leon? It seemed to her that Leon knew. A Jew. He uses neither Love nor Christ. . . the unlovely and unChristian Jews. We did not meet in Washington. Yet we had a talk. It seems to me I know what Leon said to me in Washington. What Harry said at home? That is real—yet it seems more like a shadow. Harry? You must not hate Harry. Hard. You dare not. What is there terrible in hate? Others hate . . good healthy people hate. Why can't you? Why, when hate comes for Harry, do you sicken . . something in you rips, fades, bleeds away? I am pulled out from myself as if my heart from my body. It is easier to hate than to

love. You cannot. One hate? O I love this world of little people dragging through pain, mired in it, sinking in pain. O I love you! We are close. Let me hate Harry! You dare not. What has he done? He turned good. He quoted Scripture . . . here am I. Edith, Edith—your father killed me quoting the words of Christ. O this is not it. There is something beyond. I am exiled. Did God give me exile? I could have stayed and fought. . . Not Harry, God gave me exile. Will you hate God? If Harry because you thought he gave you exile, why not hate God? Why not? Why cannot I hate God? He made the Morass of pain in which the world so pitifully struggles, so pitifully dies! Hate God! Not Harry. You too . . . who knows what agony you have lived, what sickly visions you have had, lifting you up. Poor Harry . . . if one understands you, Boy . . . I understand you, miserable Boy . . . Fool! I can't hate you. God? Hate God? . . . not if you understand him also.

—There was a tree, I see a tree standing upon a mountain side above a quiet lake. And the tree's roots break out. The tree falls into the water. Downward it groans, crashing and crushing. But in the water does it not lie still? No, it rots. Why does it fall, why does it rot so still when it has fallen? Why does the Hand of God draw it down . . . God who has made it grow . . . down against its growing, down against a thousand sprouts and seedlings?

—I am falling, Fanny. Are you rotten also? Where are you going? O if you pull me down,

Lord, I must go. You do not think that I am bad. You know. God, you know everything, you must see my girlhood . . . how I pushed up, eager, straight, sunward. You must see my wifehood. You must see my motherhood. I fall. But I have not lost you, God. O it hurts! . . . Fall, fall . . . Why are you nearer, Father, when I fall?

She pressed her fingers hard against her brow. —Little brain, is God in there? Her eyes with a new salience touched the objects in her room . . . the blue burlap on her couch, the chair, the Bible, the wall of the still Church, the swift sun vaulting away above the vaulting roofs. She bound her fingers hard about her brow: —All of you . . . all . . . I hold you. . . . There is no air . . . there are no spaces. I touch everything that my eyes see, everything that my mind holds God?

Fanny sank to her knees on the floor. She felt her face free and bright above her body. Her face prayed, and her body:

“God . . . go ahead. If I can stand it, Go ahead. There you are down below. I see you. You draw me like a tree, crashing down, crashing down.” She held her Bible high, let it go, it fell. “God . . . go ahead.”

She got up, seated herself once more: and began to darn some stockings.

She worked long. At times: —I am hungry. Better go out and eat, came to her faintly dizzy head. She could not. The room was ripe and round, holding her firm.

A knock.

“Come in.”

—*Why am I not surprised?* Christopher Johns stepped into the room, shut the door.

She gazed at him silent.

"You don't mind?" he asked. "I was in the neighborhood. Thought I'd look in. The lady downstairs . . . what a dear old lady! . . . said you were out: I could knock if I wanted to be sure."

"Sit down."

He took off his coat and laid it on the couch. It crowded nearly the whole couch. He sat down.

"I'm glad I found you in. This is a nice room," he said. "Do they give you enough heat now winter's coming?"

She went on darning.

"More heat than I'm used to at home."

"Where is your home?"

"I have no home."

"You look so home-like there," after a pause he went on, laborious, determined. "Darning your stockings . . . in your dark-blue wrapper."

"All sorts of women darn stockings . . . and wear wrappers." She did not look at him. She was framed in the knowledge that he looked at her.

She saw his hand go through his thick brown hair. She felt it.

"I've been married fifteen years," he said. "I know what I feel in you."

She bit her lips. —Tell me. Tell me!

"For fifteen years I've been married to two women."

She looked up.

"Only one of them legal, of course. But mar-

ried to both of them just the same. I have had scores of girls during that time under my care. I know something of woman."

—About me? about me, kind man, what do you know?

He answered her silence. "You I do not know. You are a mystery to me, Fanny. But you're true and whole . . . that I know . . like the whole earth."

He had called her Fanny!

"My wife's name is Sylvia. She's pretty and prim and worships her figure. You can imagine what she thinks of mine! She's always been afraid because of her waistline to have a baby. But before Sylvia came along, there was Sadie. The first love of my youth. She was thirty then. Now she's fifty. Fat and sentimental, good old maternal Sadie. She'd love to have children. But how can she? She's so respectable . . she's so ill-placed in a hard world. She's been true to me, has Sadie. Sadie envies Sylvia her marriage license . . the chance she has to have a brood of kiddies. Sylvia despises Sadie, is above jealousy (Sadie's a part of the landscape) and tells herself in her heart what a far better kept-lady she'd have made, what better times she'd have had . . *she'd* not have been true to me! . . if only she were free and immoral like that fat old foolish thing."

"Why do you tell me all this terrible farce?"

"I want you to know that I know women."

"How should I know it from that?"

"These misplaced women love me . . . they're my fate."

"All of your fate?"

"Not all."

"I don't know, Mr. Johns, why you should assume my interest in all this . . ."

He got up. "Fanny, there's more between us than that."

"What do you want?" She was frightened.

"I want you to see me, as I see you. Not understand me. Understanding's rot. I don't understand you. What in hell *do* we understand? What counts is seeing. Touching. What we see and touch is part of us." She stirred. —My words! "You're part of me . . . you . . . because I see you there, attached to me like a hand. That's what I want."

"You're a fool. You had better try to understand a little. You don't know a thing about me."

"I don't want to, then. It's good you called me a fool. That's the beginning of warmth, and warmth is the beginning of wisdom. Pretty soon you'll have to blind yourself in order not to see me. You'll see me, alright. You don't want to blind yourself?" He went on: "Never another word shall I say about my two appendages . . . my simpering Sylvia and my grandiose Sadie. But you'll touch it all. You'll see what that life is . . . you'll look at me: you'll see what a lot's left over. . ."

Fanny got up from her chair. She stood blazing. Sudden she laughed and sat down. He came to her and lifted her in his arms. His big body

covered her. He kissed her eyes and her brow, her ears and her hair.

"Aren't you ashamed," she murmured. "Aren't you ashamed!"

He placed her back in her chair. They breathed hard. Silence.

She looked at this looming man. He was brutal, she felt him gentle. He was abrupt, she felt him slow like a child. He was big, she felt he needed arms to cradle.

"Leave me alone!" sudden she cried. "I am a lost creature. Don't pick me up. Leave me."

He knelt by her chair.

"I have a husband who has kicked me out. I have a child I'm not good enough to touch."

His hands curled. "Fanny, you lie."

"I had a love affair. Do you hear me? I committed adultery. Get out! Even Christ don't forgive that. Do you see that Church over there?" She jumped away from him and went to the window. "My husband's a good man. If he came to New York, that's likely where he'd stop . . . in that Parish house. If he passed me in the street, he'd turn his face."

The room was between them. They, facing each other, held. Fanny's voice changed. It had been harsh and high. It was low.

"What do you want? Can't you see that I'm dead? What do you want? Aren't there plenty of women for the rest of your life? Why me? Let me die."

He stood still.

"What can I give you? Haven't I tried to give

to my husband . . to Edith? They've taken all. I've failed. There's something the matter with me."

He stood. They were silent.

Her voice was quiet. "I don't resist you. Do you hear? I don't deserve to. I am dead. I am nothing. You don't want that. I don't resist you. You'll take your hat and you'll go. . ."

He held his silence, and she prayed in it. She saw the world all One: and of it, like a throbbing heart, like a high radiant head, she saw that there was God. But she said again:

"There's something the matter with me."

Johns came to her: he stood above her, holding her two hands.

"Come beside me, Fanny."

The tears ran silent down her cheeks. —What does it mean?

"Come beside me. O close. Lie close with me, Fanny."

She felt his arms lifting her like a leaf in a warm wind . . laying her down. She felt his hands and his mouth that fell like a warm rain on her parching flesh. She shut her eyes.

* * *

. . . So that day they had walked with Autumn burning all about them. Silently. She, walking through the years with feet at last aware: he, mute unconscious, reckless of pasts, praying that as she walked beside him . . this strange deep lovely creature who had become his life . . she should not walk away.

The day was done. They sat in their room at the Inn, with Night.

They felt the Night. It was clear and brittle like a violin: it gave forth notes, sharp, penetrable, woody: it wove its voices into silken strands. It was a dark and glowing violin. The room in which they sat was still of the past of the Inn which had been a Mansion. The ceiling came low: the beds were canopied: chairs, lowboy, brass hearthpieces, rag rug over the black softwood floor, drew into a tight repressed luxuriance, into a single mood, strong, curbed, sufficient, that was New England: ancient New England pregnant of bursting strengths.

Here they sat, thrust close upon each other by the Night and by the moodpent room.

He wanted to take her hand, he did not dare. His eyes searched her reticence.

"It was a great day, Fanny. We must have walked twenty miles."

She saw the miles . . . miles of trees flaring against their false defeat. —'We move skyward! Come, Winter, strip us . . . still do we move skyward!' She saw the miles: hours of her small feet beating immortal earth.

"Jonathan," she spoke at last, "I am going to leave you."

He hid his face in his hands.

"I have been drugged into peace. Now you want to drug me into happiness."

"Put it that way if you will."

"It cannot be."

What could he say?

"I do not know," she whispered, "why it is. It must be, Dear. Let us not argue. Let us not rend the beauty of our parting with inquisitive words—words that can only claw a truth. Let us be peaceful here for the days that remain. Let us accept what neither of us knows . . . like our births, Dear, like our deaths: just so deep. It must be."

He took away his hands from his face.

"I shant argue, Fanny. When I first saw you and loved you, I said: 'She may come: that is possible. She will go: that is sure.' I knew. What right have I to argue? You have blessed me with life. If now I must pay, so be it. Which part is the blessing—I don't know Fanny: my having you, or the long years I shall walk alone if you leave me, and fill with my word: 'I have had her.'"

"You have given me Peace. You have given me what I must give up."

"I will not argue. I cannot give up hope. Wont you speak to me, Fanny?"

"What can I say?"

"What are you?"

She was still.

. . . "Why did you come to me? Why did you let me love you? Why did you not resist? Where do you come from, Fanny? where are you going?"

Her eyes came very slowly from within her world, came to this gentle clumsy lover of hers, rested upon him. He was there, broken into deep shadow, sudden light by the sharp flicker of the open fire.

"None of us could answer any of your questions. Why should I be able to?"

"You more than most of us."

"When I came to New York, my coming meant one thing. Without that meaning my coming to New York, my leaving my home and my child were simple horror. All my life was a hideous jest unless my coming to New York meant one meaning."

"What was that meaning?"

"When I know, I won't be any longer where you are."

He bowed his head: a jet of flame touched his brow livid like a gash above his grey-shadowed face.

"When I came to New York I fought against that meaning. For all that I had given up, for all the saying to myself *You are dead, You are a sacrifice* and knowing it, there was in me a self that wanted to live, wanted the good things I had given up. That is why you found me as you did. Resist you? I hungered for you, Dear. You meant, for a while, a Home, Love, a child,—you are such a child, such a dear good child—you meant all I had lost. You took from my coming to New York its meaning. You were a substitute, see? for what I had lost. And that makes it all a hideous jest, all my life. I did not come to seek an exchange, to build on the same charred ground where my life was burned away. That I know. But O I could not resist you. You forgive me, Jonathan? I was so sick, so weak. My arms needed so to hold my child, they were so empty.

You were a lie, but O you were good. Forgive me, Jonathan. I knew all along. I needed to drug myself to be peaceful in my peace with you. The City . . work . . our flat . . they drugged me. Stealing some of your linen to mend it, nursing your cold just for a couple of days, taking the problem of your life and suffering by it, trying to help solve it . . O it was drunkenness, it was ecstasy, Dear, it was wrong. I couldn't stay drugged. So it was wrong for you. Unfair, perhaps. Have I hurt you? Have I . . O God . . have I returned evil for evil after all? I have been hurt. And in the anger and the pain, I have understood why the world injures the world. I have understood how from evil received, from injury done, comes the irresistible impulse to return evil, to injure. I did not want that. I have done it! Yes. I have hurt you. Good tender man . . victim already of two selfish women. I have come with the poison of my wounds, and poisoned you."

He shook his head. "No, Fanny. You have healed me."

"If you knew how you said that . . how weak your voice was. You were strong, bursting, bubbling."

"Whatever happens . . I am free of those two. . ."

"But now you are so still. Almost, you are thin . . Yes, I have done this. I have done this. I will continue to do this, poison others with the poison of my wound, so long as I seek to be healed. Do

you see? That is what makes the world endlessly hurt the world. It seeks to be healed. Do you see? Each human soul, wounded by another soul, seeks a soul to be healed. And the wound is passed along, endlessly, endlessly. O the vicious circle. And I am in it. God thrust me from home, God drew me as a stone is drawn to the earth . . . away and out of the Circle. And I came back and entered it again. O I will try again: I was weak. I was not aware. I will know better. *I must not seek to be healed.* That is what I have learned. Can you see that, Dear? That is the deadly poison, that is the curse of passing on the poison . . . that is the endless circle of a poisoned world. We seek to be well. We crave peace. We crave love. Even I. I came to you with my bloody soul. 'Heal me!' I said. And now you are bloody, too And I no less bleeding. Do you understand just a little, Jonathan? why the peace you gave me, the care and the tenderness you placed into my empty arms . . . why all that has been wrong? The hideous joke, this happiness you offered: the cruel wrong, this happiness I seek?

" . . . Yes . . . my arms are still empty." She held them forth as she spoke . . . toward him. "They still hunger. O will they never stop aching to hold? aching to be full? My breast is still a woman's. . . But I shall try better now. Do you hear me, God, wherever you are? I was tired. I was broken beyond knowing. I slipped back from falling. I couldn't go on falling upward upon you. Not then. I shall try again. Another chance, God, will you? . . . Yes, you will. There

is no other way that you can do. . . Dear, do you understand?"

His face was before her, crumpled, like a child's . . lost in the Dark where she had left him, weeping and yet afraid to cry. . .

FANNY walked up the street into the Winter sun. It was morning. The sun stood low in the street's square gap: its heatless dazzle was in her eyes as she walked. She walked with sight blurred by the sun among the men and women walking like her to work. They were the substance of their shadows, long and black upon the sunglazed City. They swam like wraiths, remnants of warm houses, warm sleep, in the inhuman brilliance of the sun.

Fanny thought: "When I came, what was it that led me to Christopher Johns?"

The comfort of that place, was it curse or splendor lying in her mind? What had it been to Clara? Is Clara there? She had learned quick that there was no place like it. She was unskilled. The one skill she had . . . the human one of knowing girls, of managing them well, of a clear head for practical affairs . . . who again as she stepped wearying into offices for work would read it in her?

The crowds beat on: the day was going to dim. As the sun went high, these atoms of shadow hording against sun would win. For a day. Till the next morning. Fanny felt that her feet were dark and that they walked on brightness.

—Only my feet. Because they are so tired. I am not black, I am white. In this surge of shadow, Fanny felt wanly white. Her head was

dizzy, unpropped by the warm crowds hording against cold sun.

—And yet I am so small. How changed and grown from the white girl? . . The door to the loft factory stood a steel barrier to the day. Within: musty heat air full of the stale trceries of wistful hands sewing at steel machines. She went in. . . .

Above the whirr of Fanny's work there was a voice speaking. Under the blanket of Fanny's sleep there was a voice speaking. Across her words in meeting men and women, across the words of men and women meeting her, there was a voice speaking. It was one, and it was Fanny.

She knew at times. At times she did not hear it. She would emerge from the thick inattention . . sleep or fever or work or even fun . . and she would know it had spoken. It ran through the heavy years that were now hers like a thin Light moving along the bottom of a Sea that had no sun, moon, star. . . .

—Girl. Perfect girl! I am not tall, but my body is tight. And my mind is taller than all these minds about me. It reaches higher than yours, slow brother, yours, Annie, yours, Delia. It is faster too. It moves very fast, it can skip ahead of your thoughts, it can turn about and wait and squat there grinning, till your thoughts catch up. And it is white and clean. I am fearless. I think that is purity . . don't you, Jesus up there? You weren't afraid and that is why you were pure.

My mind is white and sound like my body leaping, skipping where it wills, over low stones, over low mud. What have I to fear? I am I. . . .

—I walk the street under magnolia blooms between the proud old houses. . . . That's Fanny Dirk: queer girl! I am simply myself. When Annie begins to squint at me I know what she's thinking about, I know what's troubled her last night. I can feel sorry for you, Annie. My figure is rather roundish, but the men are just where I want them. I have eyes and lips and a mind to spit them on. This mouse-blue frock is lovely even so, as I walk dangling my parasol through the sun-splotched magnolia way. This cream-dim ruching at my neck shows the olive note of my skin. And *that* means there is blood flowing very close. . . . And the white stockings are sharp between the bias skirt and the black slippers . . . I walk fearless. I'll do what I will. . . . I am surrounded by children.

—This dingy stair . . . the factory girls . . . you are a factory woman! . . . O for them true: this horror for them is true. For me? this horror is a tale. It is the words of a song. There is a music . . . music. For you and for you and for you, grey shadows dripping from the sun through the encaverned stairs, it is true Horror. It should not be: for it is. For me, it is well . . . Fanny Dirk with blue prim frock and the olive throb of my throat . . . for it is something else.

—My room, so small, is the casing of my body. Shouldn't it fit? It must fit to keep me whole. Those gloves that were so much too big, how I

froze in them last Winter: how the Winter came in to my fingers as I walked, till I had money to buy another pair. Bargain-counter gloves . . the right size-mark . . that girl with eyes like panthers who dared not take them back, that man with eyes like dead fish, who would not! If my room is too big the world will come in like Winter to those gloves: and freeze me and burn me. Dear bare tight room! So much holier and tighter than the one of the Church: that was so big Jonathan could come in. Lies . . drugs . . came in. Here no one. You are my skin. No one dare touch my skin. . .

Her eyes went up and down about her room: her eyes stood upon its cot, upon its whitewashed walls, upon the paintless table, like the eyes of Fanny Dirk standing within her mirror.

—I do look well in black. My face is white and colors on me need just that touch of plumpness I have lost. Black eats away the hollow of my memory of plumpness. My breasts droop: the curve of my thigh is not so lovely now. Black covers me, I used to be gay almost like naked in the blue and the rose. Black wears. My body does not wear. I am wearing out. I don't know what I'd do without you, mirror! Your brightness is the only laughter in the room. Sometimes your laugh is a mocking. Never mind. I find when I look in your laughter, even if it is a mocking, that I find myself. She laughed aloud. —See what I do when I see myself? Well, friend . . why such a crusty room to case the body of Fanny? . . There were soft casings once: little

gabled house, garden so brave above the dull black earth, Harry, Edith . . you were all soft. Edith my child! Soft hands upon my arms, soft lips upon my mouth biting me with such savage softness. Edith? O my soft love whom I held all about me . . who held me all. You are gone. This hard sharp room that holds me like an iron glove—now I have you alone . . and the mirror that is laughter.

—I shut my face in my hands and you are about me, my Baby. Only you. Your hands and your hair and your little mouth. Edith, Edith . . what are you now? . . The room is truer. Naked, harsh, cruel . . room of emptiness, crushing my flesh . . you will make all of me hard, all of me callous from being cased by a hard whitewashed room: a room with an iron bed. You are truer!

—I shut my eyes in my hands and you are about me, my Baby. I am a baby with you. Our flesh is one: our hands are one like petals entwined in a flower. We are a flower together. We spring from the black earth. We have had our blooming. The earth is there, we are gone. In the black earth under the snows, there is a seed of us, my darling. I am the seed of us, Edith! . . of our softness, of the bright bloom of our twined petals the hard seed. I am lain away in the earth. The earth blooms only in us.

—Flint-hard room buried beneath the City,
You case me, I shall burst you yet!
Buried within you, tight sealed room,

Buried within me, within your bitter cold-
ness . .

The folded memory of a flower.

* * *

—Cracks in the leaping ramparts of New York. And I look down in them. I am a girl with short black hair and hands that are strong. I peer down on my knees at the fissures of New York. I kick my slippered feet behind me, peering down. My legs are solid in their white silk stockings and when I toss my slippers Jack and Harry see my legs to the knees: good legs: their eyes are bright, looking, they swallow thick . . I look down into the heart-beat of the City.

—I am not hungry. Look at me, Fan, look at me huddling to-night around an oil stove and a lamp, both on the floor and myself on the floor. Black dress, grey frayed coat . . my hair is down to keep my throat warm. The wind is a solid wall of ice against my window: a Devil sucks it back, it plunges again . . solid steel wall . . and splinters of it cut through the glass and the bricks, cut to my shoulders huddled over the oil stove and the lamp.

—They smell. Hot smell that gets cold beyond my shoulders. There in the corner, where the bed is, where the washstand, is the smell of the oil stove and the lamp . but cold. Here it is hot. I could singe my eyebrows . . It is the style to singe one's eyebrows . . or cut them or something. How do they do it, those sharp pencil-

lines over eyes? The smell is cold by the mirror . . I stay huddled. But do you think all the ladies with red cheeks and penciled brows and eye fire-dried . . are they walking Broadway to-night? . . have got so by huddling like me too close over a stove and a lamp?

—In the rest of the house it is quiet and asleep. The wall of ice plunges against my room. My room alone. I am not hungry. To-morrow I have a job so I cannot be hungry. Lamp and stove, tell me, are you burning my cheeks red too? . . are you going to singe my eyebrows? are you going to sear my eyes?

—New York! New York! why am I here, frozen and empty in your leaping arms, peering into your bowels? Women with burnt faces walk your streets. Women wander like dreams denied through your pent streets. There are in New York men and women who worship God. Christians only, Jews only. Worshipers, only of God. Are you New York, you worshipers of God? Have you made this? Has your God let you make this?

(—I am at the threshold of long thoughts, like caverns warmed with earth. I shall think now, and be no longer cold nor hear the wind like a steel sea on my shoulder.)

—On Broadway there are women with burnt souls, and there are Jews. New York is full of Jews. What does that mean? Spirit of a Jew quenched the white-stockinged girl: bore her to womanhood. Word of a Jew thrust her forth. Hand of a Jew guided me to this Cold seeking warmth . . led me to this City where

there are Jews in swarms, in sultry pools, in tumults!

She was still. The wind was a steel broom sweeping the ice of the world against her huddling over a lamp and a stove. The frail room held. She heard no wind, she saw no room. She sat swaying within an aureole of smutted heat grey-faced, over the black mass of her dress: and her hair knotted against her throat.

“Tell me,” she whispered aloud, “who has understood? Harry was wrong, he did not understand you, Christ. He misused your words. You have forgiven him. But who . . . who understands? You were a Jew, and we alone who are not Jews worship and quote you, Jesus. Why is that? You were a Jew? The Jews saw God . . . they only during those angry ages before Christ had the Grace to choose God. Why do they leave you, Christ, you and your words in silence? Are they so close to you they do not hear you? Are they so close to you that they are you?”

Her hands clasped above her face. “But we are better! sweeter!”

—Do we not understand? Are we children, Lord? Are we children playing with the fire of Thy Word? Who is grown among men? She thought of Leon.

—Your lips knew not Christ nor Love. . . Yet who beside you has known me, who beside you has healed me?

“Tell me!” her voice was high in the stark cold room. She rose up on her knees, and her arms and her words were higher than her face. “Tell

me, God! How dare you discriminate against us! You have no chosen children. We all are your Chosen . . we who choose you. . . Lord, I want to know. Do you hear? I choose to know. Not what my breasts want . . let them starve. You shall not turn from me now. Look at me, Lord.”

Her hands drooped. Her face fell like a flower suddenly burned. She lay crumpled upon the floor within the City. “Will you just look at me, Lord? What have I? I shall not die. Yet what life have I? Think of my past . . think of the girl I was . . the girl bright and brave: think of the mother I was! Here I am. My life is sold—for this! I must know. Do you hear me when I cry so within myself? else—what is this? I must know! This horror of hurt . . from Fanny, the Fanny of my friends, of my beloved, my child—now this here, this dirt! And it is true. Dirt is true. What else? Have I sinned? What act of ignorance have I sinned in? What is this sense of holiness that will not leave? Which is it, God? I must know: I have sinned or I am holy?”

Her mouth was full of tears . . good tears, for they were warm. She was aware of her feet, down there, cold . . lumps that denied herself for she was living warm.

She lay on the iron bed. She slept.

From heavy sleep Fanny awoke exhausted. Her eyes opening were broken by a world cutting in, sharp and strange world of impossible impacts,

which somehow had been away. She lifted her stiff weight from bed, she had slept in her clothes. She remembered the warm world wrapping sudden about her in the night bringing her sleep. She looked at the cold lamp, at the rust-stained bluish stove on the floor. —Where is it? . . She took off her clothes, knowing that she must bathe in cold water. Her body thirsted. There was another world . . an imperious imagining . . to blot the real within her. World, world, world! The voice in her was small. —I lose myself. I go forth breaking against cold and stone. She was athirst for water.

The bite of the water on her flesh was good . . it made the world she must face realer. It bit under her arms and over her throat, it drew like a knife between her legs. It made her fingers wool. . . .

—I am a sunny girl getting ready to ride with Harry. Warm good feeling . . riding and laughing! The pear blossoms are out! . . A dismal room with its grey bulged walls and its patched pipings. About the bathtub in which lay her naked flesh, a stained and rusted bathtub, the floor was matted with cold oilcloth, colorless with many feet. Now under her gay ones!

—Come! . . a dim hall, reeking with night-shadows still, plethoric as if it had swallowed too much darkness, quenched the white shoulders of Fanny Dirk. “I hold you,” it seemed to say. “I am this dingy house and I am putting you out.”

She shut the door behind her. The street. She took it in, bravely forcing herself to know that

it was new: she had never seen it. There was a clarity about her. The world was a delirium carved, a frenzy frozen and sculpted. Only within her was dimness of soft flesh.

The street was empty. Piles of snow, color of drowned rats, lay in the gutters. A cat moved gaunt. The two rows of houses stood even, scraping the sky. They were damp-soiled scabs . . brown red . . they held their secrets as dry blood holds a wound. They hated the grey wideness which they scraped at above them, clutching with pitiful flourish of eave and chimney at a buried sun.

Fanny walked. Her feet struck the pavement. She felt how she touched the street. A thing deep terrible living her feet touched as she walked. It gave to her footfall, it did not rise in response.

—Tear off the scab

Blood would gush!

“I had better buy rolls.” She pressed her one nickel in her palm. She would have money that night.

A woman with long waist broken to the show of underwear swabbed the floor of the Bakeshop. Her arms were naked like the pole of her swab-cloth. All she was long articulated bone, swathed in moist grey. Her face, swinging above her work, smiled on Fanny.

Fanny sat at a dark table in the smell of dough, seeing the long face suddenly widen bright: seeing eyes in a woman, tender through the greased shadow of sawdust floor and a counter heavy with bread.

“I’ll have just a nickel’s worth of rolls.”

The woman came back: she placed before Fanny fried eggs, coffee, butter and bread. “Why haven’t ye been in, of late, silly?”

—*She understands!* The understanding of the woman stopped Fanny’s words. She was not hurt by this sharp tenderness like green in the crass mass of the morning.

She ate. —I must eat slow. She could not eat slowly. Something within her beyond her devoured the food.

She could not say Thank you, standing to go. She could not give her nickel burning in her palm. The woman swabbed her feet.

“Ye’re in the way,” she mock-scolled. Fanny was glad.

Street! —Why does no thing stay as it was? So I can catch up?

She breathed heavily. Her head was light, save in the very back under the coiled hair which tipped downward pulling up at her chin. She felt her stomach. Her knees were light. She felt her feet. —I could laugh! I am striped in heaviness and lightness. Laugh then!

The two walls of the street fell forward: in the air above the gutter they crashed in silence together and disappeared. The City was a maze of twisting streams. . . Two men passed. They were arm in arm. They were sleek and full in the black coats shaped to their bodies. Their cheeks and their eyes were sleek and full of themselves. About the round head of each there was an Aura. Thick troubled, it beat outward like an empris-

oned gas. A gaseous colorless world it was about the head of each, that veered against the other, drew in, thrust out, hostile. Impenetrable two men passed, arm in arm.

. . . A woman passed her. Her eyes were red spots in the soot of her face. The loose wide flesh of her feet at each step hurt. Her hands fell like the heads of slaughtered hens. Behind her, attached to the grey shawl that covered her head, a Wake like a scarf dragged dimly dark. It wavered from side to side: it was a disconsolate flutter forever behind her. A little boy crossed the street at her back: the scarf lifted, it avoided his bright eyes: it sagged down toward an ashcan, skimming the filth. . . .

. . . Fanny stopped on the curb to let a wagon pass. Huge horses drew it. They were black with white-stroked withers, hair gathered thick above their pounding hoofs. A thin man perched above them; behind him, the iron cart heaped high with tawney dirt. He was imprisoned, this pallid man, between the soil and the horses. His hands held reins. From his white eyes two little Streams of red rose, curled, flecked at the horses' steaming flanks, receded, thrust in the dirt behind, moved circling fitful about the soil and the horses. The roll of the wheels, the clank of the great hoofs, the cart's metallic strain were a tissue of hostile voices hunting the still red search that streamed from his white eyes.

—There are no ones and one. You get in my way! You don't exist! . . . She saw how this world

was a manifold of veins, carrying blood, building flesh of life and house.

—I flow. I too am livid, flowing through You.

She saw that the walls of the streets were once more in their places. She saw that men's and women's heads were once more shut: . . the beating angry solitary worlds, black, red, grey . . spherical, streamer-like . . were sealed once more in skulls of men and women.

Fanny's new place of work was in the shop of a fur-dresser.

She sat at a long table. She looked above her plying hands at the stooped forms of women across from her: looking above their plying hands at her. Between their shoulders, the window . . gold letters of the Sign standing upon it.

A. RACHMANN

FURS

They were in a room like a foul mouth that spoke to the world gold words, dropped this amenity upon the sweep of Elevated structure just abreast the window. Trains passed. Banners of cluttered stationary lives made gay in passing . . sweep of black particles in the gay flourish of passing. *Passing!* As Fanny worked, the smooth flat tracks of the Elevated trains stood like a way beyond the world. One entered heavy and thick into the train . . one was swept gay!

Fanny worked.

Skins . . dead dusty skins to be ripped and sponged and fitted into *shapes*. Shapes that were

insult to the skins. Her hands raped life. In the filth and shadow of the shop, she felt the mutter of creatures defiled and effaced into dead forms by hands that were not even bloody.

—Furry skins live.

Boney hands defile you.

I am a woman and you are under me!

She felt that they of the shop were very strong, were great . . marring the wistful lives of creatures with warm furs: running thread and needle through them, pressing cloth and water against them. She felt that she dwindled each moment of this work which made her so superior and strong against live creatures. She defiled herself . . she worked to live a desecration upon life.

And then (this work was familiar, she had held this kind of job before) the life of the furs, the life of the girls, the life of her hands died. Fanny knew again her eyes and her black hair and the wondrous world dancing forever within the wall of her brow.

—Beating . . beating . . ache. I can pay for that dear woman's breakfast. O I can never pay for what she did for me. I don't have to. The woman was good. Good is what you need not pay for. Sun . . women doing good . . love . . sudden discoveries of You in a paid world. I am glad. I have not lost sight of Goodness. God? Does one have to pay for You, God? Or have I destroyed You, paying too much? Should I have refused to pay, when the sick voice of my soul

said You must! Or haven't I paid enough? . . .
Can't we know *any* thing, Lord?

She was aware of her hands beneath her, of the scissors, of the extended furry deaths against the filthy table. —We're paying. We're paying? For what? . . . Well, we're paying.

She was strong. —I can keep this up forever. Perhaps I shall never die?

There was a starkness in her breast, as of a thought suddenly crystal, suddenly shaped of herself, crowding her organs.

—Shall I never die? Am I eternal, seeking . . . seeking? Am I in Hell? Is Hell true after all, and am I in it? This is not Heaven!

She had the sense of an eternity in her hands paying, in her brow's ache, paying. —Souls in Hell . . . feel like this?

There lay Time beyond the lettered window. She looked on a neat little world of Time: Time ran upon steel tracks, Time carried mites of human life rigidly down a tiny way. The trains, the houses, the streets, the wisps of sunny cloud through the roof's gap . . . all was a pasty toy-world: make-believe: the world of Time and Space. She gazed on it in passionate condescension within her sooty workroom, hands paying, brow in search paying. . . .

Outside. The day above the Town was lovely with Spring's intimation. Soiled snow-piles melted in brackish streams. The gutters lay mud-splashed. Men and women moved drab, undifferentiate through the damp brownness of pavement. But like a wave of butterflies above a

mudhole, Spring fluttered hesitant, diaphanous, young.

Fanny held her face up against downy wings. —My shoes are torn. She felt the down pull of her torn shoes under the wings of the Spring. She knew that because she felt such heaviness of feet, no one like her prized this afternoon.

She began to walk. She stopped. —*You! It is you!* The form, sudden and sheer in its familiar individuation—Clara Lonergan—stood before her still, with warm hands clasping her cold ones.

“You, Fanny!”

“Clara!”

The face of the dark girl: “Nearly four years I have longed to find you.”

Fanny’s eyes: “Nearly four years . . .”

Clara could not speak. “You, you,” she kept repeating, “. . . you . . .” She focussed her eyes and saw her. She was still.

Fanny felt: —She knows how I am. This girl has always loved me.

“Come, we’re going to dinner. We’re going to spend the evening. O Fanny!”

Fanny knew that if her eyes could pierce within the daze of this meeting . . . under the Spring, in the snow-stained street . . . she would see Clara trimly, quietly dressed—richly. Clara hale and hard and shut.

—This girl has loved me!

They did not speak, walking. Blue night, a swathing of cottony blue mist, crept from the skies, curled the miasmatic streets, bundled the

rigid Town in its soft glamor. Lights made little rents. Fanny moved beside the hard thrust of this girl . . . —She has loved me! . . . through the blue warm-ness.

They entered the subway, they rode, they came up. They stepped from a bright street into a bright long room—facetted in white round cloths and mirrors. The two chairs held them across the white space of their table.

“Shall I order?” said Clara. “I’ll order. Her eyes, deep and many colored like a pansy’s black, felt the lean blade of Fanny’s poverty: caressed it, bled against it. She ordered

Oysters

Broiled chicken with asparagus, sweet potatoes, peas

ice-cream and cake

and coffee.

“I’m so happy!” she said, her eyes flooding out upon the face of Fanny. “I am so glad we have met at last!”

—She asks me no question of myself. Not that she fears lest I ask questions of her. She wants that. Your eyes and your lips so finely cut, so frozen in their revolt . . . how long ago was that? . . . ask: I should ask of yourself. I cannot. Let me sit here, Clara, quiet. The food, O the good food! Let me sit here in your eyes. I cannot give you that which my asking of you would mean. I cannot. There is a little openness between us . . . our separate years. In it I breathe. If you cover it with your coming close, I shall choke.

“We are going to a show,” said Clara. “Which show shall it be?”

“I have seen no play for so long! How should I know?”

“I’ll choose.”

She called the waiter. “Bring me an evening paper.”

—So strong and sure of herself! I am weak beside you . . . Am I better than you?

At last Fanny’s eyes could open, could meet the glow of her friend’s.

“I am glad we ran into each other . . . I am glad to see you.”

Clara was pale. —She is very understanding. . . . No . . . not to-night shall I be better than you, strange girl crowned in your defeat. I know what you have done. I am glad to be willing to be weak beside you.

Once again Clara smiled. “Here’s a good one. Music . . . you need music and dancing.”

—I live in music and dance . . .

“O I am so happy! I have missed you, Fanny. I did not know until there you were gone . . . I did not know . . .” She stopped. Fanny’s eyes were turned inward. —Don’t, don’t! they said. —The space between us is what I breathe. There was silence.

Fanny was weak. She had walked level through the dark. Now for some time she felt that she was mounting. Felt this as one would who tramped in blackness by the strain upon herself. She could not touch the essence of her thoughts, gazing at Clara. They both had left a

common world which they had never shared, years since. What in the sheer uncommonness of their separate careers was it they felt they shared? It was very strange to Fanny. They had no mutual subject. They sat across the table from each other, mostly in silence. What there had been to speak of . . . Christopher Johns, the Office . . . was dead in them both, was no subject. Yet now they shared a silence, they shared a pregnancy. —I am at ease, here, weary, full of food. . . . I am going to listen to music. Mounting, I am at rest!

They sat in the first row of the Balcony. Fanny knew these two young women . . . one not so young! . . . sharp in the motley welter of the crowd. They were swathed together in one sharpness by the anarchic auras of the other men and women. Fanny saw herself: small, pallid, worn in her black skirt and her dun waist, close to this girl who had sold her defeat for the clear rose-colored smartness of her suit, for the diamond pin under her lovely throat, for the sleek health of her hair. But her eyes, she felt her eyes greater than ever, wandering in the hunger of her face . . . the eyes of Clara were great and were her own.

The music was far away. . . . "This is a tale of far away, a world I have left and forgotten." The curtain rose. The actors were clad in costumes of 1840. White Pierrot danced through the glitter of ladies in prim bonnets, gleaming bared breasts, hooped skirts. Rhymed words, words of love and fidelity and perfection chimed with the pelt of taffetas and brocade, of powdered hands flirting fans: and white Pierrot with eyes lost in

the paint of a gay world, seeking love and perfection.

—People do not dream this way. I was not alive then. This is a costume comedy with pretty airs. Romantic . . means false, in time and in place. Fanny struggled now against a world falsely remembered. —This is not true, not yours. Pierrot was in love with a fine lady who tinkled at a clavichord . . gowned in sheer black with her white shoulders bare Her flirting shoulders and her painted lips took his round love: his deep was lost in her shadow: Pierrot was lost. He left her broken: and another man with words of love sharp like hooks to catch her flesh caught in her shoulders (they had not turned for Pierrot), turned her round, won her.

. . A sad play with laughing music . . little streams of water running up the dark side of a mountain. Impossible . . unreal. Fanny saw the breaking audience. It rose and splintered in the new light house. Men and women suddenly distinct like the jewels in their hair, like the hard smiles, hard lines of face against the new blare of the lighted house. No. The play was real. Laughter went twinkling up the steep of mountains. Laughter flowed up hill. That was the way of laughter. —You men and women falling away downhill, have you never laughed? Upward! upward! Fanny pressed Clara's arm.

They stood in the night. The breast of Fanny flowed with her hurt and her life: her heart was liquid at last: her hurt and her life, pressed so long against the urge of Clara, melted and

flowed. She took the hands of her friend. She pressed them. She knew what was to be. . .

They walked through the broken throng of men and women parting, waiting: through the bright weave of carriage calls, whispers, farewells: through the new freshet of the City's stream spreading in blue and green and gold, soon lost. They walked in silence. They were putting off a moment of decision. The Elevated Structure stood like a sentence. Fanny's arm that had held Clara's dropped to her side. A train, jingling with lights, drew past. . .

—It goes and goes, it comes to the window where I work, to the window where I stand this instant at a table. I tear and rip . . I work in the thick shadows of dead life. I look at the train that passes. It is there!

Fanny held out her hand. . . A little man, square black beard, small red lips, sharp greedy eyes, stood with his hairy hands upon her shoulders. Mr. Rachmann!—She sought the hand of her friend.

Clara's lips sharpened.

"Where do you live?" she spoke. "I want to see you soon."

Fanny shook her head. Mr. Rachmann went. The lips of Clara parted, they were wet.

"I do not understand."

"Look at me, Clara."

"You won't let me see you?"

"O do understand! Can you see me? Can we see each other, Dear?"

Clara's face broke.

"You can't do this. You can't. You don't know what you mean. Let me come. I am all alone. O don't judge me, Fanny!"

"You know I don't judge you."

"Let me see you . . . once."

They were rigid in struggle.

"Clara, I am afraid to see you."

. . . Still . . .

"I am going a way that is terrible and unknown. It does not get easier. There is no getting used to it. Each moment, there is yearning to turn . . . get out . . . fall away.."

The girl straightened. "You think I do not understand," came her clearer voice. "But I do. More than you, perhaps. . . . You need not give me your address."

Fanny was warm and broken against the clearness of Clara. —What does this mean? Why do I reject her? She was still.

"Good-by," said Clara.

—You need me. You need me? Say that you need me, girl.

The hand of each held more than the hand of the other.

"It's all right. . . ." A moment Clara smiled. Then her eyes looked within, they met the eyes of Fanny deeply in a far space where they were not apart.

"Good-by."

—There is love in you. Love, love. What wisdom? You are not saying, Good-by. You are saying, Love!

Fanny was still. And alone.

* * *

Without turning she walked. Swift walking. She was aware of herself walking swift beneath the Elevated trains, and of not moving at all. She did not like this shadowy way with lights upon the sides of it like little creatures burning to get in. It was full of noise and heaviness and booming steel. A side street . . . quieter, cold . . . swung to her face. Southward again. But now an Avenue all open to the stars.

The tall buildings rose melting into mist. Stars flickered faint over the stillness of their pointed thrusts. They rose from stone, rigid, equal: a stone City lay before her and the houses stood one stuff with the hard death beneath her feet. Men and women, like house, like street, passed on: wrapped in stone muffledness. They were muffled in dim rigor. They were masked.

The City was masked. Corner of wall soaring, clusters of passers-by, the buzz of motors pulling with rubbered gait through the damp asphalt . . . were features of a Mask. She felt its stillness, its stifled comfort: underneath, a heated flesh she could not touch.

Her feet, beating the street, beat with her eyes and soul against the Mask of a world. It was unrolling. Sharp stone towers swathed in blue mist, private mansions mansard-roofed, façade of church, flourish of store with its show-windows alight like gems set in the pallor of the night . . .

masked, hid away. She was unmoving while the dominant procession pressed before her. And the men and women, sparse, impervious, aloof, were details of the pageant that defiled. Yet it seemed to Fanny she beheld an act deeply ceremonial, religious. The high masked world . . human and stone . . became a chant, lifted in stilled ecstasy unto some god. . . .

Her room was outside all this. The gas jet she lit stood on the whitewashed wall, made it orange, made shadow of bureau and chair stand stiff like marionettes . . stiffly agile . . upon the orange glare. She was shut in: the pageant and the hymn to a lost god were far away. Yet now in the room it was to her as if she stood at a window. She looked out secure upon the song and pageant of the world . . .

—I am very quiet. A terrible thing has come to me. I have met Clara, the one person in the world who knows of me and cares . . and I have sent her away. A terrible thing has taken place. I am quiet.

She was afraid of thinking . . afraid of how clear she saw. She took off her clothes, she turned out the light. She lifted wide the little window that lifted her eyes above a jagged finger of roof to the sky. Lavendar-blue it was, washed in pale streakings of eternal fire. She lay stretched-out in her bed: warm, with eyes so wide she could feel the night pour in to them. . . Manifold Night! Night of the straining of flame through space, Night of the march of stone masks above the softness of men. Night——

A question stood sharp up:—"Why did I want to turn round, walking downtown? Why did I not turn round? What was the thought always there as I walked—as of a face and a will watching——"

Fanny smiled. "You wish she had followed you. She didn't! Never fear. She is not that sort . . strong unsentimental Clara."

Fanny saw Clara naked in a wide soft bed. Very sharp she saw her: the small clear breasts, the fluted strain of the thighs, the tender cushion of her belly. A man-form, vague, bore down upon her belly. Fanny could see no more. She feared to sense that if she dared see more she might see Johns! She saw a desecration as if the talons and beak of a great bird tore at the thighs of Clara . . strips of the flesh of herself. She could not bear it. Her palms clutched over her eyes and ears. She turned writhing upon her stomach. She was still.

—Poor Harry! . . .

"No," she said aloud. "You wanted her to follow and she did not. She respects you too much. Can't you respect yourself? What you said to Clara was true . . the long and terrible Way that you must go. Cannot you say to yourself what you said to Clara?" Once more Fanny lay in her bed straight-stretched and her eyes open: once more the light poured in upon her eyes.

Her head was light. It lifted her like a balloon above the City. She was afloat above the brittle stone. The world was black and was suffused by fires. The light was the Black breathing.

"It is true," said her mouth. "I am falling upward. I have nothing to do with this. I am falling upward."

Her words lifted upon the Night that poured in her eyes. She saw her words. She saw herself. She drank her words and herself.

—I hope it is not Johns who is keeping Clara. No. It is not he. Clara would not . . even if he would . . after what was. Why do I care? I am not done with Clara! . . But I did right. I must say No and No . . endlessly No to all the world's questions. That is saying Yes—to what? How strange it is, this Being in me that flies. I am the wings of myself.

She was very light. She was afloat in an impenetrable Dark which yet she pierced for she was suffusion of light. She lay there, eyes and mouth wide open, limp palms at her sides, and heard the cadence of her breath.

—I am not unhappy, she thought. Then her eyes closed. . . .

She was in a station of the Subway. Clara was beside her. Crowds surged in four great streams. She lost Clara. She was afraid. Streams dark and turgid beneath the crust of the earth were men and women. She saw ten thousand hats and gloves and skirts in sharp detail. She saw beneath the pandemonium of colored cloths, straw, feathers, leather . . each one sheerly alone . . a single Skin. She felt the Skin grey-white. The straws and silks and collars pricked the Skin: and the Skin hurt. She wanted to be naked of these varicolors. They hurt. The crowds flowed on. Upon

the faces of the men and women were smiles: the faces were not naked, they were covered with smiles. Upon the feet of the men and women were shoes. Shoes and smiles pricked in hard waves on the grey-white Skin.

She was aware of this steel cavern under the crust of the earth where four streams ploughed and mangled upon each other. On the steel were casings of cement. It was rough. It cut against the quick of her nails. It pricked the steel that held the edge of the earth.

She was aware of this all one, in a great hurt, as she lay asleep with her skin against the rough stuff of her blanket.

Upon the Subway cave was the stone street. Upon the stone street were the buildings. In the cave, in the street, in the buildings, flowed the people. They were a black blood flowing everywhere. Here they were thickest. They caught the rigid Subway cave: it rocked. The street was rocked with the rocking hole below. The towering houses swung and dipped in a steep measure, over the streets, over the plunging Subway throng, under the Sky. A mighty rhythm ran with the black blood through the stone world. It danced. The Subway rolled and bounced. Buildings bent down, jerked high, circled their points in a great Dance under a sky that was still.

Fanny watched the dancing world as if it were close to her: as if it were upon her like her heaving breast.

"I am the Dancer," she cried.

She danced. She was still, she was in bed. But

she danced. In the veer of houses, in the see-saw of streets, Fanny danced. Over her head she was aware of a sky steadfast.

Fanny danced faster. Towers of stone leaped up now, leaving the streets. Towers of stone soared like rockets against the still stars and came back. Gutters twirled: crowds wove into pythonic knots. The skies caught Dance, like fire. The stars moved very finely; they did not swing far from their orbits: rather they tremored, they shone in vibrance, they sang like high notes very fast . . . and the sky swung long, swung so slow like a tide through the warp of trilling stars that it was hard to know that the sky moved. In the clothes of the dancing Subway throng there were bugs: they danced. In the roofs of the street, there were stars: they danced. Fanny saw the bugs dancing, and the dancing stars.

"I am the Dancer," she cried. She danced through the Night. . . .

She opened her eyes at last to a day pale worn-out. She lay in her bed, under the haggard morning as under a wet sheet. She was unable to move.

"I am sick," she said aloud. Then again she slept.

When she awoke it was still day. Sharp stillness. She heard the blood beat in her temples. Her body was blanched, it was dead. Her head lay hot and swollen above an inert body.

She shut her eyes. The day swathed her head in myriad light shawls. One by one the shawls withdrew, they were gone. She opened her eyes against black Nothingness. It raced into her eyes, it won her swollen head. But her body it could not touch. Her body like a knife-thrust lay, white and still, within the belly of night.

—I must get up. She tried to get up and could not. She lay in her warm water. Her body prevailed. The water was cold. It was dry. Her head scolded against her stricken body. Her body endured like a bar of steel. It was solid death in a melted world that was dying.

There were days and there were nights. There were nights and there were days. The world winked open, the world winked shut. Rain dribbled into her window: sunbeams deflected lay like gold dust against it. Below, in the houses, feet fell; voices rose, fell; shadows of human will writhed up the twisted stairs to her white room: no substance followed. She was alone: her blanched dead body and her boiling head. Beneath her a great Void in which the sounds of doors and feet and words, the rumble of a cart, angled about like little balls of celluloid in a great hollow caldron.

Day night day . . the world winked dimmer. Fanny's form lay like a wave-washed beam on the edge of the sea. Color was long since washed. The water sucked at the meat and the juice of the wood. It was porous light, it was rotten before the ceaseless suck of the water of the sea. Her

head was lower. It no longer boiled above her body.

Then Fanny shut her eyes: and her eyes were all of her head that was not like her body . . dim and porous and sucked.

"Is this what all was for?" said her eyes. "Have I gone through all this—all this—to die like a cat in a barn?"

She knew she was not to die.

"I am going to die. My life has been nonsense . . . and now I am going to die."

She knew she was not to die.

Her eyes were still. There was a great Pain clenching her breast and her bowels. No pain had been before.

"How long have I been lying here? How many days . . is it weeks? . . I have not eaten? Will nobody come?"

Her body was Pain. Her body was coming alive, so it was Pain.

"Will no one come? Will you let me die like a cat? I am thirsty . . I am sick! I cannot move. I danced too much. I am paralyzed with Dancing. Don't let me die."

Her body was coming alive, so that it cried.

"Edith . . Edith, save me! Harry—won't you nurse me? I have nursed you so often. Water! My child! O Mother Clara I did not mean——"

Her body was coming alive, so that it was afraid. It screamed, it lied, it abused: it wanted the water of life.

"It is too late. I am alone. Something was

wrong with you, Fanny. You seemed good and sound enough. But something was wrong with you, Fanny. . . Look at you now: you Fanny Dirk, you bright Fanny . . mother and wife . . you now."

She knew she was not to die. She knew there was nothing wrong.

"Does God send clean creatures to a death like this? Death in a stinking room where no one comes to see what is the matter after days and days. Starving to death alone, in New York . . O how rotten you must have been!"

She knew she was not rotten.

"Is there nothing left? No one single thing? Mother, I can't find you. Edith, I can't see you. Harry—Edith—all gone. Is there nothing left? Yes: one thing left."

Fanny lifted her shoulders faintly from the bed with straining elbows. Her heavy head fell backward: her eyes swung dizzy toward the ceiling.

"God! you aren't much for me. But I believe in you. Do you hear? Even now. I am not rotten, God. I have not done wrong, God. You must hear me, for I believe in you, somehow, my Father. This is all right. This is not just—this is not unjust. It is part of the world. I am leaving the world. But I have been a part. I believe that, God. I have been a part and you need all parts. You have needed me, God?"

There were tears in her eyes . . cool good tears. "Say you have needed me, God, for a part in your . . something. Whatever it is. You've done with me, now. But you've used me. Haven't you

used me, God? You're casting me in the ash-heap I know. Can't you say at least 'Thank you' before I am gone?"

Fanny sank back upon her pillow. Tears made cool stains down the hot parch of her cheeks. Her eyes roved through the opaque bright room, breaking against the cruel harshness of familiar objects. Her hands against each other on her breast tremored and fell apart. Her mouth moved. —Is this the end?

She knew there was no end.

A great Peace came. Her body was soft and enfolded. Warm waters held her close, washed her of anguish, washed her of doubt and of weakness, washed her at last of self. Fanny was perfect in sleep like a child in its mother. There was a smile on her mouth. . . .

LONG hours the room with its still freight moved through the world. Unbroken, like a seed, buried and hard in the earth. At dusk the door opened slowly. Clara stepped into the room.

The prostrate friend in the stiff iron bed, black hair matted over the hot white face, the walls, very still, very cold, shutting this beaten flesh into their death . . . struck Clara in the door.

Her hands clutched her throat. She knelt beside the bed. Her hands and cheeks took in the heavy breath, the burning brow, voluptuously. "Thank God," she murmured. Then the luxury of sense and of articulation went. Clara was action.

Ten minutes later, a physician stood with her at the bedside.

x

Fanny opened her eyes to a world softened and new. A warm world, she accepted like a child, without wonder. Over the gas-jet was a shade of green. The walls cast a kind dimness. On the deep windowsill a brazier burned. Bottles stood sheer from the shadow, blue and black and brown . . . warm emanations of a good will they seemed in their suggestion that being ill she was nursed, being weak fortified. They stood beneath the tender steam of the brazier like good words.

The room was warm. It had warm breath. It

was alive and gentle wrapping her about like fond extensions of these quiet, these brand-new sheets. . . . Magic! all good . . . all so more natural than that hard seed of the past she had dwelt in, been imprisoned in: long walls, rigid, shutting her up, lifting her softness hard above the City's hardness. Fanny drew out her hands from the warm covers. Fingers touched, tried each other: fingers pressed in the moist flesh of her palms . . . lean hands yet new. The room was a caress.

Through the moving door came a figure very high: figure slim and athrob beneath a drawn green gown, under black hair let loose upon its shoulders.

Clara pressed sheer through the caressing room. Clara! Magic and wonderlessness, most magical of all. Clara! with her hair let down, in a green wrap. Her loom was the substance of the warming air: her being sheer over the bed was the mouth that had uttered all these transforming words: the blue alcohol flame, the bottles, medicine, milk, the soothing walls about the fended light, *herself*, newest word of all, that lay in a clean bed . . . the truest and the sweetest word of all this mouth that was Clara.

"Dear, dear," came Clara's voice. "You are awake and you are better."

She sat beside her. She gave her broth. Fanny was soothed, in a oneness swallowing the hot broth: she was one with Clara. . . . Dimmed gas, bowed throat of her friend and agile hands holding the cup and the spoon were one, articulately, with her own heavy eyes and the lips she felt as

she opened them and swallowed. There was her will, there were the features of her will. What touched her eyes and her skin, her ears and her taste was a symphonic unity which she could love, as she lay swathed within it, as a child loves its own body. . . .

Clara slept in a big armchair which had appeared in the room's transforming. Each day came the Doctor. He had a little ruddy VanDyck beard and eyes that twinkled. He had soothing hands. He was a part of Clara . . . hence of Fanny. When he left, there was his soothing wake in the soft brown air of the room.

"You are silent," she said to him, "like a canoe."

"Well, we'll paddle you back to shore and health," he smiled. She saw the eyes of Clara beam excitement.

"You have not spoken," Clara said, "you have not spoken before!"

—I love my silence. Fanny lay back in her new thick pillows. I am going to be silent.

"Soon we can bring you away from this dreadful place. Can't we, Doctor?"

He nodded.

—I shall keep my silence as long as I can.

Fanny looked with warm eyes at the glass of milk which Clara held for her. —I could hold it now. But I won't. She did not speak.

And Clara spoke little. Words about her comfort, words about her food, words of endearing

reproof when Fanny woke too early or did not finish her toast.

But already Clara was no longer herself. Fanny saw her long dark face, haggard now and pale with heavy eyes. She saw the hand that feeding trembled a bit.

"You are not a mother. Yet I am your child. Just a little longer. For you are not a mother. I am a mother."

Her eyes shone happy with an unuttered promise: "I shall be a mother to you. You shall see." But Fanny dared not speak. For she knew when her words came, there would come from within her, deeper within her, her words' denial.

Clara's strong hands, tense like a cord, soothed her gown, clutched her shoulders, lifted her so that she could drink.

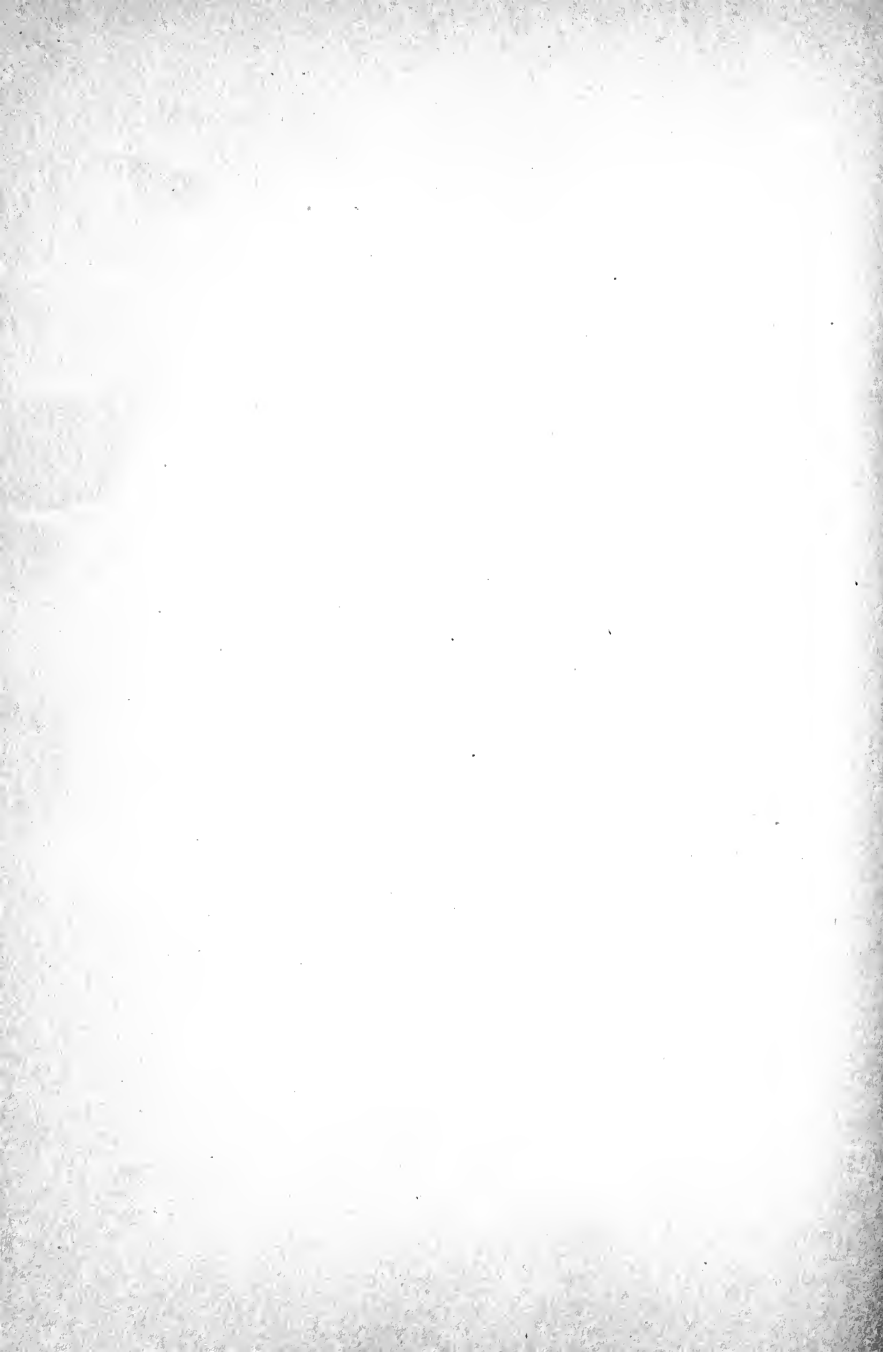
"To-morrow, dear, to-morrow we bundle you into a cab. At last! Away from this dreadful place."

"Where?"

"To my place," said Clara.

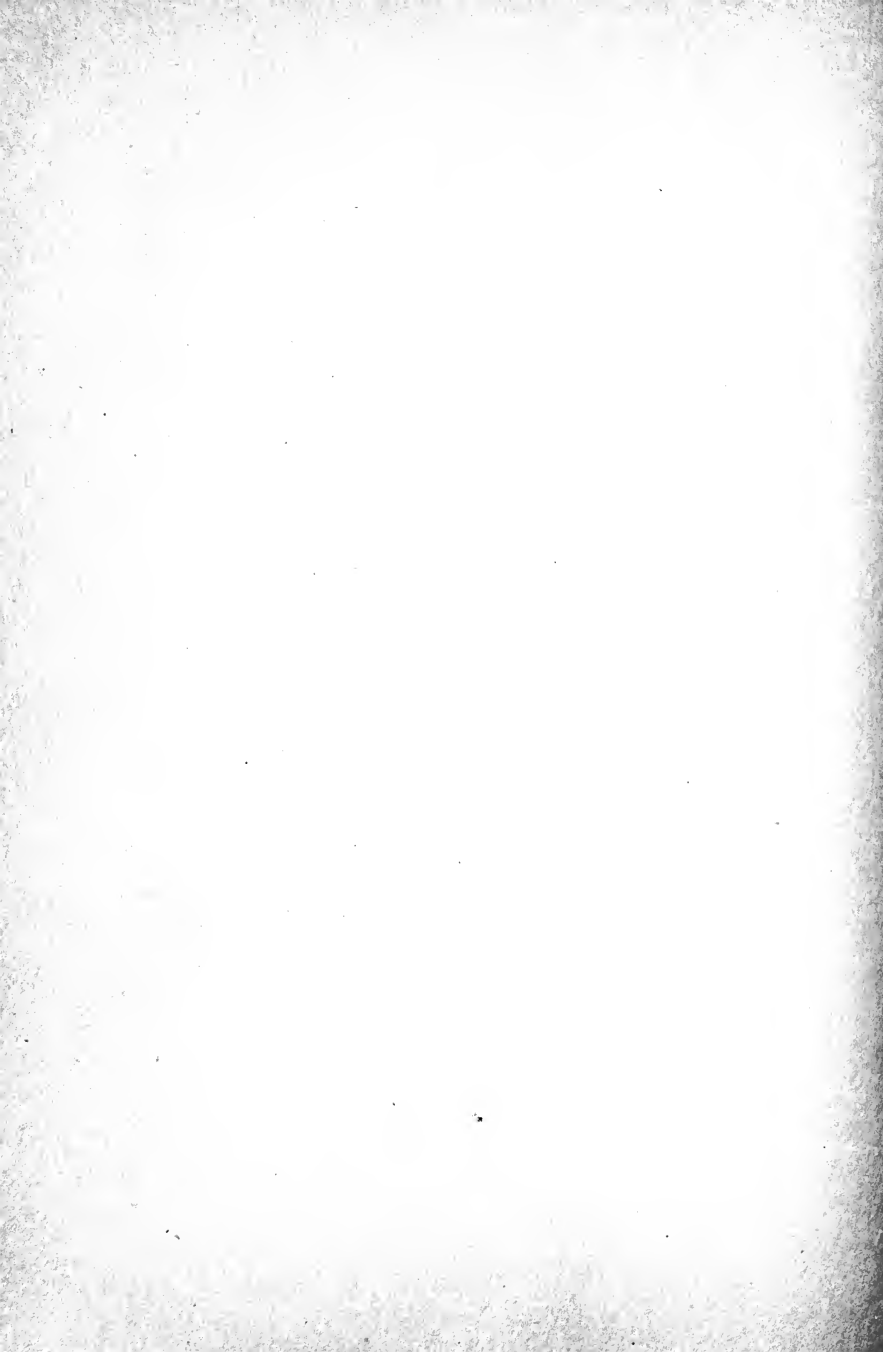
—I shall not speak . . yet awhile. For I am afraid of the word that will come when I speak.

The girl knelt down at the bed. Her head lay on Fanny's breast. Her hands went wistful searching to upon her eyes, upon her mouth. Her eyes were shut and her lips moist upon the gown of Fanny. . . .



FIVE

CLARA



FANNY sat in sun that was caressed and tamed by high blue curtains. She shadowed a mirror in her hand . . it gave her eyes her face . . with a sharp shoulder. —They used not to be sharp! . . Wrist tiring with its tiny burden, arm taut and thin in the blue house-gown Clara made her wear welded the silver glass with its sheer image to her face. Her eye, seeking its own secret, worked unaware through the medium of parched hand, spent wrist, peaked shoulder. No glamor was between her eye and its reflection.

Her face was overlaid with shadows: subtly, terribly it was increased beyond its natural buoyance as if sudden in that Night she had danced through all of life had made invasion of her large eyes, of her delicate nose, of her mouth quick like a young leaf, and forced its burden on them. She had brought from her home the face of a girl: she looked at a face branded her own and the world's.

About this weighted face the room she sat in: cushioned, satined, a room of crude caresses. She alone was salient peering into this image of herself. She alone had mass and had dimension: and all of it upon her little features, drawing them, deforming them, making them ugly. Making them herself.

—I must face this! I have become a person.

She felt herself as a sharp weight set in softness. So she was upheld: but she was free. There

was a bar between herself . . —I am true! . . and these warm falsehoods Clara had set her in.

—Saved me by them! I know that. You are all Lies about me, yet me who am true you have saved. Without you what could Clara's naked love have done? Without you wouldn't she be dead as I was? Your milk, your covers, your warmth . . lies: O my still bed, O sun that falls about the grey of my shoulders like a lawn of Spring upon an autumn earth—bless you, for there is quiet in you yet, and it has let me think. . . When I am at last all in thought, I am in the way of the end. To end is to be healed. I understand that. Life is a wound that only life can heal.

—I might have died without beginning! You, lies, saved me. What does that mean?

She lay back in her chair and the mirror fell to her lap. —I have lost so much hair . . black lovely . . don't think of that, that is not thinking! All you must fall as the hair fell. Fanny's eyes closed. She slept.

She came to waking with her head forward and her hand upheld, watching her face in the glass. Clara was in the door.

—Did my looking at her asleep . . how she has grown old! . . make her raise the glass like that to her shut eyes? Then they opened. Clara was afraid of the displacement her thoughts might make: she moved in her room and sent out words

in it as if the air were tight with some subtle, feeling substance easily overflowed.

"How are you, dearie? . . . Been sleeping?"

She laid a bunch of violets in Fanny's lap.

Fanny smiled, her eyes and her hands clasping the flowers thanked her.

"I'm so much better. Where have you been?"

"Just shopping."

Fanny had asked no such question before. Clara sensed beneath it the significant stir of her friend's mind once more into the outer world. The outer world! What was going to be when Fanny once took note of her own world? She could not talk, for she was afraid. She drew a chair beside her in the sun, and held her hand and was still.

"You are looking better. I have a broiler for you. *Now* you must begin to *eat*."

Her stress stroked a wish: Fanny should eat long, must lose herself for a long time in eating.

"I have been thinking," Fanny said. "The sun's so good, I'd like to walk in it."

"Dearie, it's cold and raw out."

"I know it is."

"It's only good in a warm room . . . like this."

"I know."

Fanny's hand clasped over Clara's, silencing her. They sat in silence. With gazes long and almost parallel they thought of the sun that was good only in a warm room.

"My room," thought Clara.

"Whose room?" thought Fanny, . . .

"Clara tell me, . . you were not shopping. Why can't you tell me where you were?"

"Dear, when you're well—"

"I am well now. A little weak, but well. Didn't you say yourself—"

"I've been with him."

"You needn't hide it. Don't you think I know?"

"Yes, Fan. But it's all so untrue, since you are here."

"He must be good, never to come around."

"He knows all about you . . and he won't come—until I tell him it's alright. He *has* been good. He has left me alone. Well—he knows if he didn't—"

"Tell him to come," said Fanny.

Clara jumped up. She was afraid and uncertain. She knew not why she was so. "I must see about dinner." She tossed off her hat and was gone.

It was a little flat. The dining room, the living room, the bed room, were compact and warm in dull brown, rose, blue. They were retiscent rooms, stiff proper little places furnished as with sedate conventions. Naught of vice, naught of abandon about them: they had no strength but they were full of ease. Like married old ladies, they were at rest on something very sure. Fanny did not understand them. But in her fever she had taken and used them as a babe its nurse.

Fanny and Clara ate, almost in silence. Fanny's

half chicken . . she made her friend take the other half . . was a luscious problem. She must eat it fast . . before it got cold or spoiled . . it held her like a spell in its succulent evanescent glow. It lay in the white plate the color of sun-stone.

"Since I have been here," she said, "no one has come to your place. No one. You've broken up your whole life because of me. Dear Clara . . that's a hard thing for me to know."

"I've had no time for my friends. I've had too anxious, too wonderful a time, nursing you, Dear."

"I was very sick?" Fanny smiled. "When I looked in the glass today I knew that. I'm an old woman, Clara."

The girl shook her head. "Don't talk that way!" Her eyes were full on Fanny with a joy that was not denial. She did not mind. "You are not old," she said. "But you're mature . . . somehow I suppose, next to all us, you must seem old to yourself. You are ripe, Fanny. You are glorious." Her face glowed with the hard repressiveness against her feeling which was her only show of feeling.

"Come, now . . to bed."

She helped her to undress, diffident but sure: the gestures of a nurse swathed in a mist of sentiment of a bridegroom. She smoothed the covers: she placed a hand on Fanny's brow pressing her head within the pillow, folding the soft quilt at her chin. She did not kiss her other than so, with her hands. But once, in those gigantic days of the

shadow of the Church, of the shadow of what else that had come and was to come! had Clara's lips touched Fanny.

Fanny lay in Clara's bed . . for a month Clara had slept beside her in a cot. And Clara, by the low table lamp that drooped above her shoulder shedding a bloom upon her neck, read aloud a story. . . .

Words were like pebbles against an iron wall. They rang upon a sudden sense in Fanny of the bed she was in. Bed large and deep with hangings of lavender, bed all about her like strong arms of a mother she had never known yet hers! . . Clara sharp within it . . sharp breasts, sharp thigh, sharp tenderness of stomach: and the vague black manform looming! . . this bed about her. Its arms were warm and were hostile. There was care in them, mother's care, and yet they had no sense in their great balm of what she was they shielded. Fanny lay . . the words of Clara reading against her were futile . . in the arms of an alien creature who had given her birth. Being of shame, being of denial of herself, and yet she was its thing. Fanny knew the ineffable rightness of her lying there, of her healing there: of this monstrous mother. From this she must suck life, from this which was of alien flesh and spirit she must build herself. Strange angry mother . . her own! . . holding her life and lifting her above it.

Words of Clara were little clangors, shells of sound far off. Fanny lay . . Clara's bed! Clara's

bed and his! . . . enswooned in great arms muffling her and feeding. Very white. . . .

She saw black earth, earth breaking against rock. In a crevice of stone through loam, through rotted brush and last year's leaves she saw a root, swollen and livid-red, thrust a small green shoot: upon it pendant a cupped bud like a pearl. She saw in a Spring of sweeping clouds above a steaming earth, a blood-root blossom. . . .

The clouds were gone, there was mist. There was earth lost in feathery warm mist. There were bursts of trees budding . . the feathery mist . . the blood-root.

Waking she saw this room.

Clara's cot empty. With covers thrown back it held in its sheets the impress of her body. Shades drawn. A purblind light soiled from its passage through the grey-brick airshaft lay on the blue and lavender like smut. A gilded radiator buzzed and spat. . . .

Fanny heard Clara in the kitchen getting her breakfast. The negress maid did not appear before eleven: and this morning Clara was going to New Jersey to see a married sister who was very ill.

She stood in the doorway. The sooty shade of the room lay in her face, filling the folds of resolution under eyes, beside her mouth, with a harsh darkness.

—She is not well. She is not happy! Clara looks herself.

—And the room—it is itself.

Fanny felt salience in the ugly morning . . for the first time felt salience about her.

—It'll go. You'll put up the shade. You'll cover up these beds . . sheets speak. Some of the sunlight from across the way will filter in. Sun lies sometimes. These true shadows for seeing where **I am** will go. Fanny could not smile.

“You're still half asleep,” said Clara. “Want to sleep some more? Lucy could get you breakfast later on.”

“No. I'm awake. You bring in the little table. Let's breakfast together.”

“In here?” Clara's smile softened the shadows in her face.

“Yes. Right here. Do!” . . .

She felt she must face this room, this heavy stifled room, this weighty fact of where she was and with what. She must eat this room with her breakfast. . .

It was hard to swallow. Her throat was dry and was full. Above her the chandelier came down in a tawdry twist of gilt from the dim ceiling. The gilt flaked, and she saw black iron.

“Does it taste good?” asked Clara.

She looked at Clara. —God, how dare I pity her! You are good. What you have, you have given me. . . . “Yes, Dear, it tastes good. You made it. It tastes of your hands.”

They ate . . the breakfast, the room.

“Give me your hand!” Fanny clasped it across the table. A bit of toast it held fell in the sudden sally and the butter smeared the palm. Fanny

opened the palm, she held it full against her mouth. She kissed the grease and the flesh.

"I am eating you," she spoke.

Clara's eyes were frightened. So she laughed.

"You dear! . . Could you eat some more toast?"

—How do I know what I eat?

God, you insult us.

If we must feed on dirt

Why give us love of the Clean?

Why give us fear of the dirt

If we must feed on dirt?

Since we must eat and eat

Why give us knowledge? . . .

What do I eat?

If I must feed on You

God, why do I forget?

THE whole day alone, she promised to herself. Lucy in the other rooms would intervene a little: nothing was perfect. Yet Fanny felt that this was good. She was at ease in her armchair. Soon the sun would sweep into her place. And Lucy had the musical quiet of her folk, she really did not interfere more than a cat might . . . a useful cat who would bring her her lunch on the portable table and her drops every three hours. Lucy had a soothing grain, almost like sunlight . . . a sort of saffron practicable sunlight.

“Ev’thing a’right now, Mis’ Fanny?”

“Yes, Lucy. Thank you.”

The girl swayed on her little haunches, holding her hands across her breast.

“It’s gone to be a fine day. That’ll mak’ you fine, Mis’ Fanny, right soon again.”

“I wish I was as fine as you.”

“Aw Mis’ Fanny!” Her hands beat out in protest . . . glad gaunt hands stripped by their work of flesh, and yet the music of them lived in their bone and their gesture. Lucy went off, her soft shoes patting like the cushioned feet of a tamed panther.

The door closed to the kitchen; Fanny was alone. Lucy would seek her den and fill it with steam and suds, wrap a red rag around her head and fall to work with an occasional cry like a wild

beast musing: lost in a sort of virginal ecstasy which Fanny loved, of work and dreaming.

—She's diligent! If she were German, wouldn't I say: No one but a German could be so thorough? And she's a negress. White blood yes . . . but it dilutes, that's all, the mellow flow of her life. O you superior Lucy! Yet she's colored.

Fanny thought of the ugly prejudices which still lay rooted in her mind. She could praise Lucy if she patronized her too. Take away the condescension and at once she looked into a pool, misted by childhood fears and girlish passion, of black distrust.

—No use thinking of all that. I believe I had a mind: it might have amounted to something, too. A woman's mind at work . . . as a woman's mind . . . not as a lawyer's or a doctor's . . . like some men's minds: what'd the world have said to that? Well, it's too late. My mind is a wreck also. It keeps on going, like an engine, broken and off its track, ploughing the earth and itself. Going . . . and going. Who knows though? Perhaps it is not off its track. Perhaps my way is not a two-rail track over a flat plain land. There are other dimensions.

—O I must have faith! That is the terrible thing . . . how in my weakness my faith went also. Faith and strength seem to go together. That's a good sign, is it not? Proves faith is not born of weakness. My faith takes *power*. It's hard work. Come back!

—There is nothing else. It is inevitable. Like a tree that grows. And has its seasons. What

does it know about them? 'Now I burst into blossoms . . . now I am in leaves . . now I am stark and cold.' I am ashamed. Weak failure! Rescued by Clara, living on Clara, in a flat some man gave Clara. Shame! . . . Well, it is Winter. Didn't Leon know that it all meant something? . . Did he foresee a thing like this? What would he say? . . Harry was wrong. O I am sure of that. I am the answer to Harry. What did he know of Scripture . . of Jesus? We have taken Christ and his name. What have we done with him? What more than the Jews who refused him? Are they Christ, themselves? . . Why do I think so tenderly of Jews?

—Leon? One man . . If Edith were his, not Harry's, would she love me? You are nine years old, my beloved. I can see you. I can see you so clear because I see you naked. What clothes have you on today, going to school? . . Mrs. Parker's School. That wouldn't change. Motherless child, you have a mother. Can't you feel . . O you must *feel* your mother! . .

—Suppose she could see her mother! No . . not with your young eyes. How could they understand? Fanny shrank in her chair. . . —Thank God, I am hidden away. . . But my name? Let it stand. Some day perhaps, since she is my own, she may have eyes that can see me.

—No. Never! That is all past.

She knew that this was past. She knew there was in her still living, that which could not bear that it was: a part of her that held the memory

and hope of her child close to her breast, sucking yet giving her warmth.

—My little girl! As you grow, you become smaller beside me. For I grow so much faster. My little girl! Will you catch up with your mother?

The mother saw her naked. She was willowy supple, tender like a flower. Her flesh was cream and crisp, it was like the meat of a fresh peach.

The mother saw her clothed. She stands in a blue gingham frock, almost hidden away by a blue and white checked apron. But the black stockings were there and the tight sleeves and the loved white neck. A dark braid fell across her shoulder, tied with a stiff blue bow. —Her hair is not dark! Mine . . mine is black. Smile at me. *Where is her face?*

Fanny was troubled: she saw her child again. She wore an apple green mulle dress very clear and clean as it hung straight from her shoulders. The loved white neck! pulsant with breath of her child. She curtsies. There was a flounce at the hem: and at the end of the puffed sleeves was a ruffle. Edith's bare arms! She wore white stockings, little canvas pumps. —She is thin! —*And her hair? and her face?*

Fanny shut her eyes and her hands waved with pain before them. She knew these dresses were her own! She saw her child in her own girlish frocks . . And her hair? It was golden . . but it would get dark. —As dark as mine?

—Does she have my frocks and my hair? Through Fanny's mind passed dresses she had

worn: for romping and for dancing, for lessons and for parties. —I have forgotten not a single one. Are Edith's really the same?

She was moved. She moved against her emotion. —I do not see her! *Your* dresses—not her *face*! Has she the same frocks? Fanny knew this could not be. . . . She knew there still lived within her that which needed to play with the sweet fancy that it was.

“But no,” she murmured. “In no way be like me! Edith . . . to save you from that . . . come, look at your Mother!”

With her daughter's eyes, Fanny beheld herself. —I am not hateful. She was a little woman, breaking and bewildered with flood of a world within her heart. She was a little woman tortured in the uses of a Hand that would not leave her alone.

—But I don't see an end . . . *There is no end*. I do not see a growth . . . *There is no growing*. . . . Let me rest here quiet. I am still weak. Too weak to assemble my thoughts. What if the room is Clara's . . . Clara's lover's (is there at least love here?) What do these things mean, beside the truth that I am quiet?

The sun sent a sudden shaft under the cornice of the opposite house. It lay in a cold glare, gradually milding, on her.

So Fanny gave up thinking. —Why am I so hungry, having done nothing?

Lucy cleared the table . . . folded it.

“O it was good, child!”

“Thank you, Mis' Fanny.”

"No, Lucy: leave the table. Bring me the cards."

"Yes, Mis' Fanny."

Fanny played *Canfield*. And even this was beyond her. She was amazed to find that she had placed a red Jack under a red Queen: over there was a black Three under a Five! "I am skipping chances and making horrible mistakes."

She shook her head. "How dull I am!" She was helpless against it. —Stupider than Lucy. Duller than the stupidest person in the world. She smiled. She knew that the reason was that she was filling with a Light.

—When I was pregnant with Edith, sometimes I was like this.

She fell back in her chair, and shut her eyes. —What is it this time? She slept. . .

The bell awoke her. Her nerves jangled bright and disparate like the three tones of the electric bell. Lucy appeared.

"Why Mis' Fanny . . it's some frien's o' Miss Clara—"

Fanny's words were swift action. "Did you send them away?"

"No 'm, I didn't yet. Ah—Ah tole 'em ter wait. Should Ah—?"

"Let them come in. Tell them Miss Clara's friend is here and will be glad to receive them."

Lucy stood suspended in the unheard-of formal words of this lady whose value she sensed. By her face, she understood. She went out.

Fanny's awareness was sheer above the drowse

of her chair. Her eyes commanded her face: they were suddenly young.

The door opened. Two women . . . Lucy shut them in, and they were three together.

One was a girl, short in her coat of black velours, all black except the gleaming face under black eyes, black toque: all round and yet her eyes watched Fanny sharply. Hostilely. Beside her a tall lank woman, very blonde, rose like the embodiment of the strange stroke in the round girl's eyes.

They stood, Fanny got up.

"You must come in. Clara's away for the day. But I've been so eager to meet Clara's friends."

The taller one nodded.

—What does she recognize, that she nods, in my words?

"My name is Sennister—Susan Sennister. This is Miss Liebovitz."

Fanny took a hand, white in its feel beneath the long glove, and took a hand small like a child's, warm and ruddy: gloveless.

"Do sit down."

Miss Sennister looked at her companion. "Guess we got time, Tessie?"

"Sure we have," she smiled. "We really came to have a glimpse of you." Her smile was rounder.

"I'm glad," said Fanny. She looked at Susan Sennister, to make her also smile. It would help

matters. Miss Sennister smiled. But the smile did not help. It hurt.

"I have been sick . . . Probably you know. And Clara's been an angel."

"She is an angel," said the tall woman, as if Fanny had not meant it.

"O . . . she's a good thing," said Tessie Liebovitz. Her black eyes lay on Fanny's. —There is no misunderstanding! They were soft. "We love Clara," she said. "We say yes . . . just automatically . . . to Clara's friends."

"Thank you," Fanny looked sternly at Susan Sennister. "That's a beginning at least." She wanted to smile. This woman was so very stiff. (She must be very stern. —How can I tell? What are they? . . . She went on: "I say Yes to the friends of Clara—but with all my heart.")

"Have you been here long?" asked Tessie.

"Very long!"

"We heard her speak of you, before she brought you here," said Susan. Then she settled back in her chair. Something within her was released. She pulled off her gloves. Her shoulders slackened. "That don't prove anything, of course." Her smile was different . . . sweeter in its hurt. "Clara's like all of us. We are good pals. We have a lot of secrets . . . trade secrets we chew over. That gives us an air of being close. But a real confidence . . . ? Not us!"

"O I don't know," said Tessie.

"That's just it—you don't."

There was a pause. Fanny was in the sun . . . feeling herself within it strangely, unfairly

warmed against these two. She wanted to warm them.

"Won't one of you take this chair? The sun's so good."

"We've had more of it than you," said Susan Sennister. "Stay where you are."

There was another pause filled now with three smiles that were unstrained.

Fanny's head was light. —My! I am weak. There was a dim strip weighing above her eyes, on her brow. Beyond, in back of her head, she was light. So that her head seemed tilted toward her eyes. She saw these women. —I can be comfortable with them! They are strong: they could comfort her. Tessie Liebovitz chatted. Her own lips moved. She said nothing. But they were moist. . . .

Then she saw: Long black earth. A man was standing still. He had gnarled hands, all else of him was young. He had clear-grey eyes, he had bronzed hair and beard. His cheeks were hardened by hot winds, but his lips that were free of the beard were soft and red against the showing of white skin.

She saw him clear upon the long black earth. —*He is Jesus!*

Many people passed him. She did not see them. But she saw the eyes and hands of Jesus go forth quietly to each . . . They passed. The eyes and the hands of Jesus came back to themselves. The earth was harder and harder. The earth passed by him. Villages and cities passed. Altars were shut against his hands. Priests were shut

against his eyes. The houses of the great passed him shut. And the earth grew blacker. . . .

The earth was very black. A tree, blasted by lightning, thrust its ruin against a purple sky. The earth was very black. And Christ stood on it underneath the sky, and far from the solitary tree that twisted leafless over the horizon. Christ raised his arms, but his eyes looked down upon the barren earth. He was changed. He was twisted like the tree. He was shaped like the tree. Like it he was broken and bent from stanchioning purple sky above a barren earth. But he was white. And his beard was red. He had no hands, he had lost his hands even as the tree its leaves. His feet were buried underneath the ground.

A woman was before him. In a scarlet robe, against her breast, she held a boy.

"Lord," she said, "this is my child. He drives me each day into the Marketplace with paint on my lips."

"Why do you call me 'Lord'?"

"Are you not Lord of us all?"

The black earth bloomed. Jesus was gay, he was a clear young man. With his two hands he touched the shrouded hair of the woman and it streamed like chrysoprase.

"Your child has blessed you," he said.

She parted her robe, it was green also: it fell away and she was naked before Jesus. Her belly was silken smooth, her breasts thrust up like buds in a new Spring: she had born no child and she had known no man. Before Christ her body was sweet like a lily at dawn.

Fanny pressed her brow with her two hands, and saw the quiet women. They had stopped talking. They looked at her deep, and their voices had lagged away.

"O . . you will have tea!"

"Thank you, No. I'm afraid—we tire you. We'd better go. You're not too strong yet." Susan Sennister got up.

Fanny was warm in their understanding, and was ashamed. "O don't go! You make me feel—I'm a bad substitute for Clara. Please!"

Susan sat stiffly, then she relaxed.

"You know," she said, "it seems to me I've seen you before."

"And I've seen you!"

"When was that?"

"O ages," said Fanny. —Am I mad? "Before we were born? And you too, Tessie Liebovitz. You were singing."

"No," said the girl, serious. "I was playing the violin."

"Your fingers were singing, then."

"They were too small," said Tessie.

"Too small to sing?"

"Too small to sing . . too small to sing," the girl whispered rapt. "So I work—my body, see? It works for my fingers that were too small to play."

"What was I doing?" Susan leaned forward.

"Your hands are frightful. One of them clasping, clutching . . one of them thrusting away." Fanny's hands were before her in a frantic dumb-play.

Susan laughed. "How right you are!"

"I am a fool," cried Fanny. —Am I mad? I do not seem to mind. They seem to understand—*something*. Am I a fool?

"She is wonderful," said Tessie.

"Clara told us—"

"What?"

Susan got up. She held Fanny's face gently in her hands. She kissed her brow. "—that we would love you."

Lucy came in with tea.

"Clara saved my life."

"She's a good thing," said Tessie. . . .

They drank their tea in silence. No hand trembled.

Susan and Tessie got up.

"You must not get up!"

They came close to Fanny. Her eyes were almost parallel with Tessie's red mouth which had spoken. She looked up at the straight lips of Susan. On Susan's neck she saw a birthmark, black like a footprint. Against it, all she was white.

"We're going to come again—"

"When you're better—"

"I *am* better," Fanny smiled.

Tessie said: "You are a woman."

* * *

Clara was there, and she still vibrant from it all.

"You had visitors," Fanny said. "Miss Sen-
nister and Miss Liebovitz."

Clara studied the face of her friend. —What have they left upon her? within her? She saw the face of Fanny glow: it was aquiver and alive, her face, as not for a long time.

"I gave them tea. That was right, was it not? The little girl's a dear."

"Yes."

"When she left, she threw her arms around me and kissed me."

"You had a good time together?"

"Yes. And you, Dear? Your sister?"

"She is worse. But she won't die. Not that sort of thing. Just pine away and eat up her husband's money and nag her children."

"There's nothing to do, I suppose?"

"Of course not. You liked Tessie? Not Susan."

"I did not understand her?"

"Do you think you understood Tessie?" Clara was eager. She did not challenge. She wished to be assured.

"I think so. . . . All except those hands—"

"Hands!"

"That is: that is what I understood the best: they're the key, so little and so terrible. You see, I know that. Only, I haven't used the key."

She smiled in the amazed eyes of Clara.

"Fanny, you sometimes frighten me." Clara took her hand and held it long and looked at it. Then she squeezed it and smiled also.

"You don't mean to say: this very first time she told you her *story*!"

"No. Why did you think so, Clara?"

"What you said about her hands."

"Who couldn't see that? They are so small and tortured—plump perverse hands. She had no gloves. Her hands, Clara—her hands have—"

Fanny stopped. She could not go on.

"Yes?"

"Well," she whispered half to herself, ". . something ruins all of us, I suppose."

She was blanched as if she had walked leisuredly upon a strange outlandish road, forgetful it was so: and sudden there was a precipice below her feet. Mind held back her almost plunging body with the plunge's horror. She recoiled.

"I know what you were going to say," Clara's voice was hard, "her hands it was, that *ruined* her. . . ."

"Clara!"

"We are ruined, for you. I know it. You are right. We are bad women . . ruined. . . ."

"Clara!"

Fanny jumped up. She faced her friend. She sought her eyes, sad and rebellious, and held them.

"Clara, you have saved me, you are sound. It is I who am broken. When one is broken, Clara, one does not always quickly understand. One lacks words. One falls back, Clara, on words that for today are lies."

She clasped the wrists of her friend. They stood tense, against each other: so. In a taut silence.

"We are all ruined," came Clara's voice. "But you still love."

"Then none of us are ruined."

Clara's head tossed in anger. "No sentiment!"

"There are no ruins I tell you" Fanny met her.

Fanny lay quiet in bed. She was relaxed at last. The vibrance of these many hours had run out into a Space beyond her, where the sharp thrusts through her nerves lay lost in a pool of glow.

She lay in this glow in bed: Clara beside her, responsive to her friend's new peace but unaware of its synthesis of warring parts meeting beyond her.

"Should I read?" she asked.

"Tell me about your friends."

"They are friends of mine." Clara raised her head as if her words were a challenge. Fanny lay still, with her eyes shut, waiting.

"There's Tess. Poor Dear," at last. . . .
"Her story's not hard to tell. That's why I was wondering how you knew. Didn't she hint? Well, I don't wonder after all, Dear. *You* are so wonderful. O I am glad to have you here. I want to keep you forever. If only I could . . . Well: Tessie was born in some mudhole South —Carolina, I think. Her Pa kept a general store . . does still I suppose. He's a Jew, you know. Tess says he never was no good as a business man. But a dear! He'd sit in his room back of the store, holding some old Bible in his hand . . or a prayer-book . . and sing it out, half-aloud, with his head

and his shoulders swayin', keepin' time. Tessie says that is what Music meant to her. . . . When the poor old man learned she was musical, Tess says, he fell on his knees. I can just see him, his thin old knees half worn through the black pants, creaking and cracking on the dirty floor. And he thanked the Lord who, if he *had* taken away his wife, had given him a daughter who loved music. There were other children, but they simply didn't count. He didn't have more than enough to keep 'em all in food, but Tess got a violin. And soon the Dame that taught violin, piano, French and artistic sewing in the Town told the old man Tessie knew more than she did about music. She was a wonder, she said. She ought to study in a big City and go in for concerts.

"Well . . the old man got down on his shakey knees again: and this time he didn't pray: he swore he'd get the cash to send Tess to Richmond or New York, if he had to starve for it . . . even if he had to sell—O I forgot. The old man had one proud possession. He was a poor old ignorant man, but one of his ancestors had been Wise and a Rabbi. He kept a mouldy store and kept it badly: but this Thing he still had from the wise old Rabbi . . and it shone in their home like the sun. Tessie gives it a name I can't remember . . but I can see it. A sort of breast-plate it was . . a breast-plate of some holy Priest of their religion: square and in gold. And set in it, in four rows of three each, were oblong gems. Each was different—camelian and ruby and lapis and topaz and jasper and amethyst and agate: I don't re-

member them all. On each was carved a holy word in ancient Hebrew. Well, there was the mouldy store and this thing of glory shinin' in it. But there was the daughter who could make Music. So she could make it right, the old man sold his treasure. He was religious. Keeping that Relic was part of his religion . . but giving it up was also part of his religion. Tessie got a first class violin . . they cost like fury, you know. And then everything went well. I don't know the particulars. Some big guy from New York who was down in Charleston gave her a hearing and next year Tess bought a new dress and a bag and took the train to New York. Her Dad had even mortgaged the store. But there was Tess gettin' ready to earn thousands in New York . . while the rest of the Liebovitz clan in mudhole, South Carolina, lived on water and hope."

Fanny lay still, with her eyes shut. In the pause: "Then it happened," she murmured.

"Yes,"

—As always.

Lord, why is it always?

Why do you break the soil

In which you plant the seed?

"—the old master, Tessie says she loved him, waved his hands and pulled his beard. ' You have talent, Fraulein. O you have genius. You are music! But those hands. What are we going to do about that hand?' They were too small, Fan. You saw 'em. They were too small. You got to do all sorts of stunts on a fiddle before you go in for concerts. And her fingers simply were

too short. Not too short for playin' in an orchestra or somethin' . . . but for a concert, where you stand up all by yourself. . . . Well, Tessie hadn't come to New York and put the Liebovitz clan on bread and water and made the old man sell part of his religion for another part, just to play fiddle in a restaurant. She went to a doctor or something of the sort who told her he could stretch her fingers. He stretched 'em alright—"

Fanny raised herself on her arms from the pillow, her eyes still shut.

"—till something tore."

"Till something broke."

"It was all over."

"I know the rest," said Fanny. She sank back in her pillow. Both of them were quiet. . . .

Each was conscious of the other's breathing. The room was heavy.

Clara stirred. "Shall I open a window?" she asked.

"What about the other?" Fanny held her.

"O I can't say much about Sennister. I have known her for a long time . . . nearly four years I think. She just is: she has no tale of woe."

"You are good friends?"

"Yes. I have learned a lot from Susan. She is wise. She has a brain, I'll tell you. She thinks a lot . . . and reads."

"What does she read?"

"O books you've never heard of. But I don't think she gets her ideas from them. They're *hers*, you bet."

"Tessie, I guess, has learned a lot from her also."

"She's our Sunday school teacher," Clara smiled.

"I see."

"She has a religion. She believes—shall I tell you what she says?"

"Why not?"

"She says: 'I believe in the power of Hate,
I believe in the truth of Sin.
I believe in the failure of Truth.' "

Fanny was silent.

"One day she made us learn all that by heart. Don't take it too serious, Fan dear. She'd had a drop too much. She was jolly. So were we all . . . It's a joke, of course. . . ."

"Clara, you know it's no joke. You know it's a religion."

"I suppose so. It don't fit in very well, though, does it? with the religion of the Bible."

"There are so many religions of the Bible. Perhaps it fits in right well."

Clara's nervous laugh: "You and Susan'll get on well together. You are both philosophers. But you're both *good*—though you're better, Dear, and deeper. I know that. Susan talks awful bad. But you know, Dear, what she says *has* something to do with Christianity. Sort of twisted like. But it *has*. You wait and see. When you know her. Susan . . she's like a saint. . . ."

—Christ, you must loose your buried feet and
your arms without hands!

Christ, you must not be twisted like that
tree!

Christ, you must not be rooted like a tree!
Walk the earth, brother.

Fanny's eyes shut once more. She saw the white neck of Susan Sennister: on its side the little birthmark like the print of a black foot . . clear because her neck was white. She heard her voice: the resonant low voice of one who speaks often with herself. She saw the black eyes of Tessie upon her: the full lips, redder than rouge, the crowded high-pressed brow, the child-hands. . . .

Clara sat still. —She will go to sleep now.

• • •

FIRE in Clara's eyes. The desperate embrace together of her life and of her love for Fanny rose lucent in them. She said:

"Well, if you want to meet my friends, you shall meet them. I'll give a party to celebrate your being here, and your getting well—and the hope that you'll stay on."

"That'll be fun!"

"Then there'll be more than just me to do the hoping."

"You're a dear."

Fanny saw a party of eighteen years ago. She met Harry there. They walked the verandah . . . walked back and forth three dances.

The espagnols are open. The music flutters through into the purple night like cherry-colored ribbons.

"Let's go on the lawn," he said. "Let's dance on the lawn."

"We can dance here."

"No. Let's dance on the lawn."

"Then we won't dance."

But at last she yielded. He clasped her waist. He sprang with her through the elastic night. The grass was moving crystal sea under their silent feet.

Her breath bounded against his. "You see?" he panted. "You must always do as I say." . . . And even then, even then she sensed in his words

what she willed, not he. —*Was it so later?* His going down, the agony . . what *she* willed?

“O I’m so anxious to know whom all I’m going to meet.”

Clara shook her head. “Such folk as you have never met.”

“I hope so! I want to meet new sorts. I want to find a new world. I am sure it will be better. It’s yours, Dear.”

“They’re all I have.”

“Don’t you dare apologize! Don’t you dare spoil it. I feel as if I could be happy again. Whomever it’s with—I’ll be happy with them.”

“They’re a strange lot,” Clara laughed.

“Who?”

“Well, there’s a Judge: there’s a Gambler: there’s an Officer of Police: there’s a queer guy who ought to be a poet——”

“O how exciting! Do the Policeman and the Gambler get on?”

“They’re side-kicks——”

“Side-kicks?”

“Partners.”

“My! what a lot I’m going to learn,” she murmured.

“That’s what brought Tessie and Susan together. Her man’s a police Lieutenant. Tessie’s is Abraham Mangel——”

“And Clara, yours——”

“That’s a secret, Dear. You call him Mr. Mark . . O I can tell you. Tellin’ you a secret’s like burying it. Don’t you let on. He’s really a Judge, Dear. Right in New York! Think of that.

He's so good. . . Shall I tell you his right name? Sure never to let on? Judge Mark Pfennig."

"Judge . . Mark . . Pfennig," she repeated slowly.

"He's a Jew," Clara said groping. She won courage from the soft distance in Fanny's eyes, inquiring, pondering. "Like most of 'em. They're the best, Fan. Really."

"Why are they the best?"

"They're the wisest . . and the gentlest. They're hardest and softest. Wait till you see Abe Mangel with Tess. He treats her like a father. Like a sentimental father. Those old puffy eyes of his with little ridges of flesh beneath 'em—just like her Dad in Carolina, I bet. Only wise."

"You say he's a *gambler*?"

"Well, not really. Never plays. Not he! He owns a big joint, that's all."

"And . . Susan's——"

"Silly! Gambling's against the Law. You know that, don't you? Well, what does that mean? Any respectable Gambler who wants to make a 'go' must have a side partner on the Force."

"O—I see."

"You'll see, all right. But you don't now. You're shocked. When one's shocked one don't see. I found that out. Bein' shocked is the same as bein' blind. . . . Fanny: do you really want to meet them?"

Fanny pondered: her head low, her eyes fallen upon her lacing and unlacing fingers. Tessie and

Susan and Clara . . —She has saved me . . for what? . . were in her pondering eyes. She saw Clara always. —What do I see of Clara? what know? And what of Tessie, Susan? She saw them often, they came often now. They sat there, quiet, proper, eyes veiled. . . Hurt eyes. Fanny thought of Stride the Kentucky colt whom she had gentled when she was a girl. They were good friends. Stride knew her, knew that she would not hurt her, knew that she cared for her wisely. Stride knew, standing there aquiver while she came toward her bringing a handful of oats, that oats were good. Yet beneath the knowing in Stride's eyes at times a deeper world looked out on Fanny: a world of strangeness, of the expectancy of harm. So now. . . —They love me. That first time showed. Even Susan in her secret way. Yet they are so still! so far! I do not touch them.

Never had she touched Stride. Never. Now?

Sudden the thought came: —There is a part of them, a whole dimension I can not see! She wanted to see it. . . —Their men?

—Sisters! why do I call you so? I want to touch you. That I may know perhaps why we are sisters?

Fanny's hands went up, and her head. Brightly: "Yes! Give the party. Do! Ask everyone. . ."

There was something Clara, standing there, wondering for her answer, understood. She took Fanny's hands and clasped them close in her own. She kissed them.

SIX

PAVEMENT BROKEN

AT LAST the bell rang the door opened, Clara's man came in. Clara got up and they shook hands. Fanny was aware in the long strain of waiting that her power to feel was gone. —I shall understand nothing.

“This is my friend, Mark. Fanny, Mr. Mark.”

He was long and moist and breathless. He laid on the sofa carefully a bundle of bottles of wine. His broad black frock coat was worn to a gloss. His skin seemed also, though his hands were white, dark and glossed like his coat. His coat was a uniform and so was his skin. He was behind them.

—I shall understand nothing!

Mr. Mark sat down, his legs were short and his knees pointed beneath the mound of his belly. They chatted . . all three . . she too.

“Well, dear,” his breath was short and thick, “expecting the crowd?”

“O no. Just Tessie and Susan, and Abe Mangel and Jim of course. My friend wants to meet my friends.”

Fanny began to see him under the cloud of himself: . . the grey sharp face, larded in fat, the shiny eyes set deep, the lips rounded and red and soft-thrust forward from a chin too long and grey-blue with its undertone of beard. His nose twitched, conspicuous, large-pored, under a brow that was smooth and white like a card.

"It's good of you, Madame. We're not such a bad lot."

"O . . I could know that," Fanny laughed, "from just knowing Clara."

"That good we're not . . not as good as Clara. But we do our best."

Clara laughed. He sighed, and his little eyes, hard like the shoe-button eyes of a rag doll, rolled up.

In this opening of mood, Fanny looked at the room . . hard gas-jets, brash lambrequins, plush . . Room she had lived in . . the floor was blood-red beneath a shrill blue carpet. Details . . details. It meant nothing. It formed no word.

The door opened again, again. Susan Sennister stood there bleak and tense like a caustic refrain to the long heavy man at her side: he was spiritually galvanized, he moved for all his power as if he were lined with metal . . Lieutenant Statt. Tessie ensconced in a big chair with her feet trilling, mocked him. A man, soft, short, slow, with unctious hands and voice, watched her effrontery with eyes afraid in his heavy mournful face. —That is Abe Mangel.

—But I have learned something in all these years? She stopped the rush of her amazement. —Be still. Just wait.

They were not bothered by her. Their knowing each other wove a glutinous web through the room, and she held in it: her stirring could not have torn it, she was tight. It was a gross warm knowing: no subtle brain-fabric . . bowel-strong and sure. Fanny felt her shoulders pressed to-

gether, her head high and sheer, in this viscous tissue of their being together.

Mr. Mark cleared a lamp and a pile of magazines from the table. Lucy came in, brought glasses which she placed. Mr. Mark with ceremonial noise uncorked three bottles of red wine and stood them beside the glasses. The talk was slow and thick: the wine diluting it, freeing it, making it run faster. . . .

"You don't drink?" Mr. Mark stood over Fanny. She smiled up, full of the incongruous sense of smiling not at a man but at some official structure. . . .

"I'm afraid—my Doctor——"

"Mrs. Luve is not quite well yet, you know, Mark," said Clara.

All eyes turned upon Fanny: Mr. Mark's wilfully considerate, Tessie's hurt and afraid blazing a partnership she had no mind of, Susan's in a twinging message that was somehow sweet, Mangel's soft because they were always soft.

Fanny felt the hard stare of Statt . . empty like a stone.

"O well—do give me a glass."

She sipped.

"It's good stuff," said Tessie.

Susan, warmed, looked at Jim Statt and her warmth turned on him.

"Of course, that stiff's too good to touch liquor! And he's as healthy as a brickbat. All his virtue allows is pullin' joints!"

Statt shrugged his shoulders. Then he smiled broadly, as if suddenly aware that Susan had flat-

tered him. Mangel, holding his glass aloft, smacked his lips. . . . The eyes were gone from Fanny. They did not come back.

She drank her wine. She was relieved and brightened. She thought of a field: it expands as the cloud barring the sun sails by. . . . The eyes were gone.

She thought of her own place with these strange thick people. Who were they?—a Judge, a Police Lieutenant, a Gambling-house proprietor, three prostitutes, herself! She did not know who they were.

Mr. Mark argued with pointing forefinger:

“Of course we do good! Would the people feel secure if we didn’t have courts and judges?”

“You do no good. None of us knows how to do good, I tell you,” said Abe Mangel. “We are all in the Dark. I can argue as good as you. Couldn’t I say: I am a public benefactor? What do I live on? The luxury and the vice of the weak and the damn-fools. That’s what I trim. That’s what I get rid of. Ain’t it better to live on that than on the hard workers and the good folk? now I ask you! O bosh! I don’t make no such delusions for myself. We don’t know—none of us—how to do good.”

Statt sat stiffly in his chair. He listened, but as one might listen to the wind. . . . The philosophic argument wore down. Mangel and Mark were unable to support it. They drank wine and turned to their women. . . .

Tessie sat on Abe Mangel’s lap: sideways and

still with her feet tossing. He caressed her neck with a soft and meaty hand.

"Well, dearie—well, dearie, are you happier?" he crooned.

Susan and Jim Statt were close together on the sofa, looking before them, saying no word to each other. And the large Mr. Mark, his manners like his sumptuous prim coat, chatted with Clara, and Fanny, listening, added an easy word.

At a late hour they got up said good-by, and were gone.

* * *

Fanny saw them again and again. She had little talks with each of them, alone. She found she was fond of them all.

"It's good to come here, Clara," Statt stalked in. "I told Susan to come, too. . . . Here, Broaddus, up here." The door stayed open. A young big patrolman in uniform (Statt wore plain clothes always) mounted the stair, puffing. He deposited a case in the hall.

"Champagne . . and good," said Statt.

The patrolman, red faced, soft with blue eyes somewhat dimmed, went down.

"Brought them for you," Statt turned to Fanny . . "set you up. . . . From Diggins."

"Diggins!" Clara exclaimed. "You've pulled Diggins!"

"Yes . . ."

"What did she do?" asked Fanny.

"Slow on payment. See? And always tryin' to bargain for a lower price. Yesterday I get

mad. Sort of lost my temper. Perhaps I was wrong. Old Dig was a right sort of bitch. Well—too late now. She's pinched. Here's good wine, at least."

He kicked the case with heavy boots. He was big and sure. Fanny and Clara stood beneath his imperturbable mass.

—How can I thank him? He's a brute. He's a monster! Fanny spoke to him:

"Don't kick that case, Lieutenant Jim."

"Why? Afraid I'll break the bottles?"

"No. . . Afraid they'll break you."

"Break *me!*"

"Hm . . hm, Lieutenant Jim. You're so brittle. —O ever so much brittler than bottles."

He looked at her in a pause that ended with a chuckle.

"O you don't say!" The skin of his face was rough: his features were too big. He seemed carved—crudely—by a dull-souled sculptor.

"You're a brittle child," said Fanny. —Why do I speak so?

"And you?"

"I'm a child too. You and I are the children here. Yes we are! We two must look out!"

"Not Mark? . . not Clara? . . not Mangel?"

"O Mangel is old! and so is Tessie! and so is Clara. You are a stupid, stubborn child, I tell you. Look out. Me too. We mustn't hurt each other. . . And you'd better stop breaking the Law."

"My dear sister child, you don't seem to understand. I don't *break* the Law."

Fanny wavered. — Why do I speak so?

“Don’t you know, you come from the South, don’t you? . . . that gambling and prostitution are illegal in New York? I am an Officer of the New York Police. I am the head of what is known in the papers as the Strong Arm Squad. I raid Houses of gambling and prostitution.”

“All——”

“Those that don’t do their duty.”

“How can an illegal house do its duty?”

“By supporting the Police, of course—the way we must be supported. I have needs——”

Statt’s face was serious and serene. He stretched out a long leg. . . . “Needs——” and kicked the case of wine. “You don’t savvy much, little stupid woman from Dixie.”

She watched him close.

“Aren’t you afraid, Jim Statt?”

He drew in his leg and crossed it over the other.

“I’m an Officer of Police. I’m a Roman Catholic. What have I got to fear?” . . .

Tessie came in, tossing off her hat. Tessie hated hats and gloves.

“—Hasn’t Abe been here? O hello Statt.”

“He’s nursing a hurt,” he answered her. “I’ve raised his price.”

The little girl glowered over the big man.

“You look out,” she muttered. “Don’t hurt Abe Mangel too much.”

“No? . . . why not?” sneered Jim Statt.

“He’ll turn good——”

Fanny took a magazine and went into the corner of the room beside the curtains. She tried to

read. She did not see the page. What did this mean? *He'll turn good!* Was that what Jews did when they were hurt too much? Was that when they saw God? . . . —Harry and I blinded by a blow that *you* see God by? Fanny sat brooding over the blank page of her book . . . brooding of the Bible, brooding over the words of Jesus Christ: hearing the sneers of Statt, the swift shrill scold of Tessie, the warm weary murmur of Clara.

—O it is good I am here!

Learning . . . learning. . . .

She saw no thing. She understood no thing. But she was at ease as an infant, also perhaps not knowing, who sucks and who swallows. —Why is Statt also a child?

Abe Mangel was there. He bowed to the group near the door and came beside Fanny. She held out both her hands and smiled at him.

“Sit down!”

Old man with the heavy face of the Jew! —Your eyes are dark wells, your brow is dry and rumpled like an old bit of parchment. Your nose and your lips droop wearily, old man!

“You are tired, Mr. Mangel.”

“O it’s nothing. Tessie’ll cheer me up, a little. . . .”

“Mr. Mangel—may I ask you a question?”

He looked at Fanny with compassion. —You are young too? you too ask questions? . . . “Why of course, Fanny. Go on.”

“Why do I like you, Mr. Mangel?”

“O—that! You’ll hav’ to answer that your-

self. Such woman foolishness, liking *me!* how can a man explain?"

"You are a bad man, aren't you?"

"Very bad. I ain't no better than a *crook*. Only richer. My wife dresses better." His eyes twinkled.

"Well, I can't help it. I like you."

He smiled at her with his weary slow-twinkling eyes. She saw his hands . . gnarled yet fat, ugly yet expressive.

"And I like you, Fanny Luve. What's the difference why you like me? Don't ask no foolish questions about a good thing. Take it."

"But are you glad I like you?"

"I should say so! That sort of foolishness . . that's all that makes life liveable, I say! That sort of foolishness—you know what it is?—it's *Trut'*."

"You think."

"O no. I am too tired to think. When I was young, I thought. I was clever. I was full of dreams. I thought—I thought . . instead of learning to make money. When it was too late, I had to stop thinking of anything except how to make money, because earlier I hadn't thought of *that* at all. It don't pay to be a thinker. You end up by being a gambler."

"All thinkers——?"

"I should imagine so," said Mangel. He brooded. Stiffly he got up. "Look here! What sort of nonsense are you making me say? Fanny Luve, I'm a stupid old feller. I don't know nothing. Thirty years ago I was a stupid young fel-

ler. I'm sure. I guess I never knew how to think."

She held up her face to him.

"I don't know how to think, either. I am stupid too."

Abe Mangel shook his head.

"You're funny. You make me feel we don't know how to think . . and we don't know how to be good. . . We men and women."

He smiled with his old eyes. But his brow was frowning. He walked away to Tessie.

* * *

FANNY:—

—You are there!

The world is dark, there is no
light in the world.

The world is close, I feel you
there about me.

You stir, you crouch, you are
still.

You do not know that I am here,
knowing you.

You lift your voices, they give no
sound:

Shrieking they are still.

—Only the dark world

Holding you and me . . .

No word, no hand-touch, no sig-
nal of the eye

Binds us: only

A dark world.

—Yet we are close!

Could one be closer in the Sun,
Loving in the lap of the Spring?
Harry and I, were we so close?
Edith and I . . . you in the grip
of my bowels, you in the suck
of my blood and my heavy
breasts,
Were we so close?

—A dark world holds us
Strange from each other, groping
with blank eyes,
With blank mouths . . .
Closely.

CLARA:—

—You are not well yet, you are not
ready to leave me.
What is the matter with you?
Why are you still here?
O I am glad you are here! You
are balm, you are pressing
sharpness on my ache . . .
I do not understand.

—You are good friends with Mark,
and with Susan and Tessie.
Also they already feel how right
that you are here with us.
And Mangel feels it. Statt feels
nothing. Statt does not count.
Is it because you are not well, not
complete, that you stay?

Is it because we must heal you,
must complete you, that you
stay?

Then you will go?—when you
have taken from us . . . what?
You give? . . . You give—to me
how deeply, to us all how
deeply!

What can we give to you? How
can we heal and complete you?

—Is it our hurt that you would take
from us?

Is it our broken-ness that will
complete you?

MANGEL:—

—Tessie should be my daughter.
Then the Fear of God would keep
her flesh away.

You have shown me, Luve wom-
an, that Tessie is my daughter.

—I am made of filth. If I could
stop hating myself!

I am a dirty Jew . . . I hate Statt.
. . . He makes me feel—this. . .
But who is he?

His body is straighter because he
has no soul.

(There are times when I would
love to kiss his body.)

—My soul is beautiful. My soul
says to me:
You are a dirty Jew! . .
What is the use? One picks the
smut from one's nose,
But one's nose smells on, the
smut comes back,
What is the use of having a beau-
tiful soul?
No one tells Statt that he is a
dirty Dutchman.

—You, little girl, with the apple
breasts and the hips hard and
sweet like an apple,
You are my soul and you are far
away.
You should be my daughter.
Then I should not have to hold
you naked. . .
She is my daughter! O if I could
say that, say: Father!
Not:—a whore and a dirty Jew
that keeps her.

TESSIE:—

—Music is a dancing wall
Between me and the mad man
world.
Wall danced away.
Stiff man world holds me and
pierces me.
You, Abe, at least have hands
soft-speaking.

—Fanny Luve . . what is the name
of your kid?

SUSAN:—

—I ask myself no question.
O horror, O torrent of horror
If I asked a question.

—The mountainside
Is steep, is snow.
I mount, I mount.
I am erect: my shoulders and my
feet
Freeze sharp.

—O the horror, O the torrent, O the
flood
Down-pouring . .
If I asked a question.

MARK:—

—Well, what difference does it
make?
At least half my life is good.
I'm a good Judge, I'm a good
husband and father.
Who in New York can say as
much for himself?

. . . They looked on Fanny naturally, without
color of her . . seeing her within the way of their
looking on themselves: so that they came not to
ask who she was who was there.

“Well, all right then . . if you ask me: you're
right. Mangel gets my goat. I can't go him.

He's nothin' but a damn gambler. Why does he put on airs?"

"I never saw him put on airs," said Fanny.

They stood. Her face, upturned to James Statt's gray one, glowed in a strange way.

"He's so humble——"

"Is that putting on airs, Jim?"

Statt stirred in discomfort.

"You're right," she went on. "It's the worst sort of putting on airs."

"There, you see? The damn little weasel! I'll stand none of his nonsense!"

"He don't give you any, Jim."

"Well, you know what I mean."

"I know that you hate him because he's just himself."

"Jew!"

"He's cringing and a coward. But even so, he makes us feel small, don't he, Jim?"

"Us small? Are you crazy? Us small?"

"Surely. Even when he is ever so mean and humble, he is asserting to our souls . . . to all in us that feels and understands . . . that he is one of those high up . . . who have made us feel and understand."

"Fanny, you're crazy. I'll kill the little beggar!"

"You won't dispose of him that way, you silly boy. It's not *he* . . ."

"God damn him."

"Jim, you have no mind and you have no heart. You don't learn at all, Jim. Why instead of swearing at Abe Mangel don't you see him

straight? God hasn't damned him. God's damned us perhaps . . by spreading him and the likes of him all over the world: or blessed us. I don't know, Jim. But *he's* not damned."

"O look here, Fanny. I don't know what you're talking about. Even Susan don't, either, half the time. None of us. But we like you fine just the same. Now, it ain't because Mangel's a Jew that I can't go him. You're wrong there, Fanny. I know lots of Jews. Lots of my pals is Jews. Mark Pfennig's one, for instance. All the gamblers . . half the gunmen . . the best of the bulls . . the sharpest of the lawyers. . . ."

"But Mangel's different——?"

"Yes! His doddering old big-nosed face bowing into the room. His softy grey hands weaving inside each other. His flat feet that don't make a squeak."

"Is he square?"

"O he's square, all right. . . So far. He's shrewd. He can be hard and smart, believe me! It ain't that, Fanny."

"A lot you know what it is? It's because he's a Jew, I tell you."

"It ain't. I got lots of friends——"

"Jim, I don't think anybody can be a Jew, just because his name happens to be Cohn or Levy."

"Fanny . . you're crazy!"

* * *

One twilight Fanny had them clear. . . .

More and more they came to Clara's flat. Evening 'parties' were frequent. Afternoons, Tessie

and Susan often called for Fanny, and took her for a walk or to a show. It was Spring. The City lay beneath the Sun's lubricity. The dirt in the hard streets was fecund. The sparrows and the robins daubed the warming world with their swift flashes of life. It was Spring. And Fanny moved, somnambulant, through a strange ease spread for her by hands forever less strange.

—You . . and you . . and you: now I see you clear.

These men and women were no accident. They had words now she understood. They had wills now—here was the wonder of her life—that touched her own. Not Harry's will had touched hers. Not her child's, to eat her's up. Not Christopher Johns'. And Leon's . . Leon's will had stood beyond her, over the ken of her horizons.

These wills touched hers!—these wills of women disgraced, of men criminal and broken, outlawed and dissolute.

—I have two hands, and upon each of them five fingers. My sickness, the harsh four years since Jonathan, have wasted my flesh. Yet it is somehow sweet. My hair is not the verdant hedge it was, it is a little stringy, a little limp. But still black. My eyes have fire at times. I am thirty-five . . . and I am real, Fanny Luve!

They felt that she felt them clear. Clara above all. The women above all. Her feeling them clear at last was a bridge to them. Their will, long champing on the brink of their division, moved on her own.

Already they had spoken of details of their dream to Mark Pfennig, to Statt, to Mangel.

"We will take a House. And you will take care of us, Fanny!"

"And make us behave."

"And make the men behave."

"And bring God with you?" whispered Clara low. . . .

They sat at her feet that evening after the magic dusk of a hard city melting to Spring: they were in Clara's bedroom.

From her chair, Fanny touched them: her fingers in their hair: her skirt fringing their arms and their faces.

"It's all arranged, Fanny dear."

They were below her, seated on the floor . . Clara and Tessie and Susan. Their will surged over her head.

She was flooded with their will. Slowly her hands stroked hair and cheek. Their will stormed her head . . surged torrentful about her.

Her eyes lay quietly upon the faces of her friends. And her hands slow. And their will a tempest.

Slowly, Fanny nodded.

Her left hand closed tight on the hand of Clara. Her right hand upon Tessie's upbrushed hair contracted until the scalp of Tessie hurt. She nodded slowly. . . .

THE STREET is quiet. The House stands braced in a wall of higher houses dusty and grimed about their stifled worlds. It is of four stories. Its mellow red brick glows with at least half a hundred years. White net curtains angle the square windows. The stoop has an iron rail that peels as Judge Mark mounts, his heaving mass buttressed by a soft white hand upon it.

He upholds his right palm with its rust stains to Fanny.

"I wish you'd have that rail off. Every time I come here I've got to wash before I can even sit down."

Susan laughs. Tessie is humming, and her eyes slide away with her balancing tune. Clara does not care.

"I won't change it," says Fanny. "I love that old rail. It's pretty. Besides, if it wasn't there some night you'd fall over into the airy-way."

"Put another in its place."

"Well, I won't. And I won't have the bricks painted either."

"Yes, but you went and did the windows—"

"She did them herself," says Clara.

"Don't you think the blue goes nice with the red? It was fun."

. . . An old house in which lived an old couple and a little maid dressed all in black, with an apron like a robin-white-breast. A big house:

these two old persons: one young. She brought her lovers to her fourth-floor precincts. Creaking stair . . creaking bannister . . a mutter: the hard sweet adventure that became no lighter and no less sweet. Her masters listened for the clandestine footprints groping, mounting: for the swifter descent as if the man had left a burden above. They loved the love affairs of their pretty little maid. She made them young, she added zest to their evenings of Patience. . . .—"We won't need you any longer, Zoe. We're going to bed. Good-night, dear." . . their knowing her wickedness spiced their prim demeanor, brought them delight in the prim way of their maid. The old lady died. A month: then again the furtive mounting steps. The old man could not bear it. In his muffled reception of the loveplay overhead he learned how he missed his wife: how in the license of their maid now many years, he and his dried spouse had stolen fruit to themselves. In the gap between the guessed fulness above and the empty bed beside him, his nerves gave out. He withered and he died. . . .

The paint of the windowsills and the Dutch net curtains are Fanny's. Little else. The house has the plethoric gloom of its mahogany false-Empire chairs, its red brocades, its striped and flowered walls. The beds are new and all alike: bright brass, cheap, furnished with soft mattresses.

In the basement is the dining-room and the kitchen. Upon the first floor a sitting room and two partitioned cardrooms. On the second floor, Susan and Tessie each has her bedroom. Above,

Clara has hers, and the back room is reserved for whatever friend be granted it for the night. On the top floor in back is the room of Lucy the maid and a storeroom: in the front, the home of Fanny, a room to sleep in, a room to stay in alone: for it is understood that no one enter. Here then she faced her life.

—My name is Frances. Frances Dirk. Frances Luve. Luve . . . Fourteen years ago there was Harry. Nine years ago he went and there was Edith. Six years . . . near seven . . . a man came back in a black suit with white sharp lips, quoting the words of Jesus. Harry, that. Just a less Christian Harry . . . whipping me out with the words of a Jew. And Edith has kept on growing. I see you! I feel you!

—This is my Home. Do you see it, Leon? This is my *home*, I tell you. For this I came North. For this, in the talk we never had, you told me I did right. Leon does not know. Edith will never know. Whores and gamblers and corrupted officers of the Law . . . God knows. God is interested. He must be. It must mean something. . . .

She thought of her failures in New York. The House became a reality upon her . . . a sort of scarlet flower upon her black tree of failures. —I have a will. I have a soul. I shall not let them die. What she possessed of strength she forced herself to give, now, wholly to the House. —It must mean something!

She studied her men and women. All of them. All of them, despite their falsity of life, held a grain of loveliness. Perhaps because this grain

had been so stubborn to live, their life in the world was false? She did not know. —But it shall grow! The House shall mean something!

She made herself comfortable. There was plenty of money. She went to old shops, glowing in walls of dusty woodcuts, classic figures steel-engraved; shops that were a litter of ripe yesterdays crippled out of shape, beyond words, still mellow. Here, piece by piece, leisuredly, she picked together things for her room:—pictures, a Pembroke table, a Hepplewhite desk, a set of slender American Windsor chairs. She picked up three graceful glass goblets, three candlesticks of pewter. She made her room lovely. She watched her language. She kept her language pure. She watched the furrows in her cheeks and the grayness. The great illness and the years before it were gone, but they had taken her bloom and her hair's wave. She used paint . . . judiciously at first. But here, her taste failed, unnourished in the tasteless world about her, and by the world of her own past where they did not paint at all: so that she came to use paint badly.

She was past thirty-five. She was a little stooped, a little brittle, broken. All of her body had gone from curve to angle. Man moved her not at all. She thought of the body of man without memory, without desire. She bought a Bible. She bought a copy, bound in crumbling black Levant, of a certain Pascal's *Thoughts* she had found once, browsing. It was Englished from the French. She liked him, whoever he was. He knew life. Yet he seemed young.

As her face grew sallow and the roundness of her cheeks sagged long, as her hair became hard and her knees went stiff, all of this resilience of fire drew to the eyes of Fanny. They were larger, blacker. They were hot wells of thought, sealed fountains of vision that leaped at times upward through the gray earth slumber of men.

And her hands had fingers sensitized like filaments of seed. They seemed, as her eyes saw, to spin with their faint tremor of response a woman's clasp about the reach of her seeing.

—Harry said Jesus said——But perhaps I can understand. From Harry's standpoint it was the ugly word and the ugly thing. That's it! That's what Jesus meant. You, Boy . . . you broke me and when you had broken me you came back and what you had done to me made me a horror to yourself. Poor Harry, I forgive you. For I understand. Like a child, you could not bear to see your own bad act. You meant to thrust out that . . . not the beauty that was borne of it despite you. Who can thrust out beauty? Jesus didn't preach. Jesus described the state of children like yourself. I guess his people were children like yourself. Some folk have grown up since then. And you, who quote Jesus, haven't. That's funny, too. And all's forgivable. Even you, down there, respectable and holy . . . bringing up Edith to be a child like yourself.

—But I love her. What can I do? Lord, I'm beginning to think! so that my love for my child does not burn me, twist me into despair? You down there . . . my Darling, . . . not knowing your

mother, judging her with the child judgments of your father . . . God! but I must be strong. Despair is childish too. My love, it is a torrent within me. Love, anger, need . . . turn it away from your hurts. Turn it away from yourself . . . which it can only break against and wreck. Turn it where it can flow. Edith, shall I succeed in daring to think of you *here*? . . .

—Why is it poison to me when I judge? . . . You, Jim Statt, you are a callous monster. You've a soul as black as hell. If I judge you I am poisoned. . . . You, Susan, you're twisted. You hold a man in your arms to feel him die there . . . all that is really he. That's your love: hate. That's your passion: death. If I judge you, I am poisoned. . . . And you, sweet Tessie, you're hardest of all. With your sensitive soft soul and your unbalanced eyes: with your wanton small hands that turned you from an artist into this. If I despise you, Tessie, I am poisoned.

—Clara, thee I love. My dark white mate! My boy! If I make plans for thee, dearest, if I dream to help thee, I am poisoned.

—What is happening to me? I am no good. I am no better. Is it better not to hate? not to despise, not to plan? Better or worse, I have no choice. If I judge I am poisoned. . . .

—Our world unfolds beyond itself,
It is a yearning, it is a leaping toward God.

—I see Him!
When the trees break out,
When the trees heave up,

—I see Him!

When men dance like little trees full of
Springtime,
There you are, God. Here . . . I am unafraid.
You cannot kill me, for I am part of your
Spring.

* * *

In the warm smoke shadow of the room the chandelier thrust its gas tongues weakly. Beneath it on the table stood bottles of whiskey and gin and syphon water. Night. The backyards swathed silence: the shut of a window, the call of a cat were in the Night like little breaks in a close textured weave.

A slight man with heavy sparse-haired head on thin shoulders, frail chest, spoke in a singing voice. His English was good, the Irish brogue was thick.

"It's this way—it's this way. We sit here night after night and we have a good time. What is it we do really? We destroy ourselves, and that means we hurt less. We drug ourselves down to these parts of life which are happy."

"Man is not happy?"

"Man," Daniel Scome went on, "is caught between the fulness of the brute and the fulness of manhood. That's where we are. We're half way. And we're weary and comfortless. Where we are we suffer. We cannot rest. We cannot forget. Because we are half way. We must go on, to a new happiness: or we must go back."

"That's what we do," said Mangel. "We go back. . . ."

A voice came from the shadow: "We got laws and governments . . we got arts and War, so we can go back comfortably. Yes."

"We're corrupted. Adam and Eve have damned us," spoke the thrust, sure of itself, of Statt. "We don't slump back. We're naturally brutes."

"I don't believe you!" cried Mangel.

"Of course you don't. You ain't a Christian."

"Nor you!" said Daniel Scome. "If we were naturally brutes, God would not bother about us."

"Nor we about God," said Fanny.

"It comes to the same thing. We are half way, I tell you. We got to push on . . or we got to fall back."

Tessie sighed. "I am tired. I don't want to do anything."

"And I am tired too," Susan chimed in. "So I don't do anything. I don't climb. I don't fall. I'd like to see anyone of you budge me!"

"But you climb," said Fanny softly: Susan did not hear. "You are all cold with climbing." . . .

In the corner beside Statt, shadowed, sat a tall spare creature with a knot of hair on a high fanatical brow, and eyes that burned blue in the dark.

"Sing then!" said he. His name was Loyden. If he had another name, no one there knew it. "If you're tired, sing. If you want to go up, sing. If you want to fall back, sing!"

"Boy, you are crazy," said Mangel.

LOYDEN: I didn't say I wasn't. You aren't

logical. I said, *sing!* That has nothing to do with crazy or not crazy.

FANNY: But if we want to be sane—

SCOME: We want to be too many things. Loyden's right. We want the truth—and we're afraid of being mad. There we are caught, again, half way—half way between what is really One.

LOYDEN: We're not caught when we sing . . . not when we dance—

STATT: You old scarecrow, what are you preaching about? Who ever heard your voice? Who ever saw you shake a leg?

LOYDEN: I have forgotten how to—without the Music.

TESSIE: Don't talk about music! You get on my nerves.

LOYDEN: You see? It gets on her nerves. The weakling. Music oozed out of her, died down to her hands. And when they got twisted, it went away.

SCOME: We don't know how to dance. That's why we're here, drinking and loving women.

SUSAN: You don't love us!

CLARA: (muttering) Only a woman can love a woman.

LOYDEN: We don't know how to dance. Dance for us, Judge Mark.

MARK: Shut up!

LOYDEN: (With a rising inflection to his voice) Dance for us, Mangel.

MANGEL: I could read the Bible? Be still!

LOYDEN: The Western world is dying!

. . . There is a hush. And Loyden's voice that

was shrill moves down to a low monotone swaying within the heavy fumes and shadows of the room like a bird planing. . . .

LOYDEN: Death creeps up. Death creeps down. The eyes are dead already. Who of the Western World can see? The feet and the legs are dead already. Where is there Dance, where is there Music among us? Among the Black men, among the Yellow men, among the Red men, yes. They still have living limbs. They still have living eyes. We stiffen with Death. Death creeps up, Death creeps down . . into the heart of the dying Western World.

. . There was a pause. The eyes of all gazed into the shadow where a long thin head, wild-haired, wild-throated, cast out words upon them. The eyes of all turned: Fanny was out of her chair. She moved to the bottle-littered table under the gas. The yellow light lay heavy on her hair, made her face glow pallid about her eyes that were dark within themselves.

"I will dance for you," she said.

She lifted her hands. They were little and very white upon her emaciate arms.

"Look up!"

But her eyes did not look up. They were dark and lost within themselves.

"I will dance for you. Look up!" So she stood, with her hands high, moveless.

The Night rolled slowly: lifting the room with a faint jerking onward. They felt the rhythm of the moving room, sailing upon the Night. Their

heads swayed and their eyes, upturned, stirred faintly, carried by the slow-voyaging room.

The arms of Fanny were rigid over her head. But she swayed along. The pulse in her throat swayed with it. Each thing of matter, each thing of thought in the room swayed on . . . except the rigid arms of Fanny. . . .

Stopped! . . . For the room was there.

They looked upon the miracle of their being still in the room. Chairs, lights, bottles, persons . . . all was still in the room.

They got out of their chairs. They sank to their knees on the floor.

"No!" shouted Fanny.

They were afraid.

"You cannot dance on your knees! Get up! Can't you see?"

They saw her above them: dancing. They saw the floor beneath them: dancing. . . . The walls! They clasped with terror for the pitching floor. They clawed and clasped. They found each other. They were glad. They subsided. Flesh pressed against flesh. Teeth knocked against teeth. Brows beat upon carpet. . . .

In the corner, infinitely far from her, for he, like her arms, had not moved with the room, sat Loyden.

"What did I tell you, Luve? The Western World is dying."

STILL the candles burned on the mellow table: Samson Brenner and Mrs. Luve looked on each other's faces above the flames. Rising and rising, the candle flames came lower. Lower at last than the faces of the woman and boy, and of the high wine glasses.

She said: "Steadily more and more, I came to think about your People. They were all about me. They were all sorts. I wanted something of them. But they knew nothing. They knew nothing of themselves. Where was the difference between them and us? They had the same women, they had the same money, they played the same miserable games for both. Why did I want something of them? . . .

"The Truth! . . Perhaps because of Leon . . perhaps because of the ministry of Harry; because I knew of my own weakness—I wanted of them the Truth.

"There were six years of the House."

"And then—?" the boy's voice was hoarse. He felt the sordid room and the sordid flat. He had forgot the sordid reason of his coming. He felt the sharp incongruence of the wine he had drunk and of the slender glasses, and of the candles that rose and that burned, rising, lower, at the table. "What was the end?"

"The struggle between Jim Statt and Mangel grew. It grew bitter. There was no reason for

it. Statt persecuted Abe . . pinched him and tortured him: above all humiliated him. Until what Tessie had foreseen came true."

"What was that?"

"Mangel the dirty Jew—O he was that!—Mangel turned good."

* * *

Clara is sick.

"I find nothing serious," says the Doctor. "A bad bronchial cough, a chest none too strong but unaffected. Somewhat run-down—and nervous." Fanny knew better—and worse.

Clara stays in bed. The House moves on. But with six years done, Fanny can see a difference: and in no fact more clearly than that Clara is sick.

—She is wearing out! *She* who is not thirty. The House is wearing out. I?

She brought her friend to her own room on the Fourth floor, where it was quieter, where they could be better together. The Fourth floor was a hush over the hard accent of the House.

"I am happy here," smiled Clara. "It's great fun being sick—and having you nurse me in your own dear place."

Mark came little: came less. Nobody cared. Clara and Fanny thought nothing of that. But Clara got no better. There she was weak . . no worse . . but also no better.

"The House wears away," thought Fanny . . . and tried not to think of that. "What does that matter?" But the House went on.

Fanny shopped and ruled and entertained. There was the hush above that grew: there was the wonted accent of their world below, wearing, wearing . .

"I am afraid perhaps, I'm just lazy," Clara said. "Doc don't think I'm sick. I'd better get up—"

"You're tired, dear."

"Tomorrow I get up!"

"No. . . . Clara, when you get up, you'll go back to your room downstairs. I love you, here, Clara."

Clara's heavy eyelids shut with a soft gesture of reticence. The light in the room was dimmed. The wood was old and mellow all about them.

"Thank you," she murmured.

Laughter and a volley of words pushed up.

"Who's that?"

"Mildred Dozen is here. And Thelma ——"

"They're wild animals, aren't they?"

"Yes. But Thelma's stayed wild. Mildred's a wild animal tamed. . . ."

Clara pondered. "They fit down there."

"You mean: we fit up here?"

Clara's eyes large on her friend: "We fit together."

Fanny sat beside her on the bed and took her hand. So they stayed. Fanny saw two lines running close . . red lines . . : they bellied out, wide, wide to hold the House: they ran in close once more. They were less red—dimmer.

Laughter and words below volleyed up to them . . . anonymous, sharp.

"Tell me," said Clara, "don't you think—"

"What dear?"

"That we fit together?"

Fanny bent over the white face of her friend. Suddenly, she kissed her lips. She laughed.

"You'll get better now."

"Fanny," the words came low. "Do I want to get better?"

It was afternoon, and Fanny serving tea.

She gave a cup to Jack Baruch: rich-bodied boy with thin long wrists and gold-curled hair, vague eyes, and a cupid's Bow for a mouth.

She gave a cup to Foxie Wesser—master of Jack: a fellow angular and small with sharp nose, sharp eyes.

She gave a cup to Thelma Clark and to Mildred.

"I like tea," said Jack.

"Why shouldn't you?" asked Fanny. It struck her sudden how quietly these two young men were dressed in their excellent store clothes.

"Well, it's funny to like *tea*. Luve, you're a wonder, makin' us come here and have a good time, drinking *tea*."

Thelma's laughter: "Only boneheads need booze. I'm tryin' and tryin' to like tea. Ever since I been comin' here, I been tryin'. But I can't just. I'm a bonehead."

"Wisht I had your wits," said Mildred. She was blonde, doll-petite. Her lips curled lecherous in her narrow face.

"What d'ya mean? I have wits?" Thelma's laughter. "I'm a damn fool. Ask Jack. That's why I love him."

She turned her face—honest face with square chin and high clear cheekbones—to the pretty boy she loved. It was plain she loved him.

—My friends! These boys, these girls. Jack Baruch who picks pockets. Wesser who handles men like Baruch and the gunmen for Mangel and for Statt—Wesser who was the Diplomat of pool-rooms, with his sharp smooth chin and his excellent English, and his intelligent calm. These girls—

Thelma got up. She kissed Jack, she kissed Fanny. She paid no attention to the other two.

"Me for my afternoon's walk. Goodby."

"You're sensible, dear," said Fanny: the lithe full body moved half in a prance away.

Wesser was still. —Where is the calm of Wesser? Wesser was troubled. The absence of Thelma who meant laughter and noise seemed to make him uncovered. He picked at his trousers. He smoked his cigar with a harsh swiftness . . . he who was so smooth. Jack was jolly. He who had brought into the too hard sureness of the House a bloom of adolescent melancholy, laughed now loudly.

Jim Statt came in.

"Well, Wesser . . . spoken to Fanny?"

"No," he looked furtively away.

Statt grunted and sat.

"A'right then. I might 'a' known you'd flinch. Well, I won't."

"Right-O" Wesser's eyes flashed. He muttered: "Your affair after all. . . ."

"Have some tea, Jim?" Fanny held a cup.

"Thank you . . . Have you seen *The World*?"

"Now look here, Jim . . . you know I never read the papers."

"Of course not. You read up-to-date stuff like the Bible. I know you. But here you've been chewing with Wesser and Jack for an hour . . and he's not told you a thing."

"Lieutenant, I've been drinking tea. Shop . . and tea . . don't rhyme."

"Hell . . well Fanny, things are bad. Mangel was raided last night."

Fanny gripped her chair. Sudden, she saw Clara upstairs in bed . . white . . in the House wearing, wearing.

"I didn't have a damn thing to do with it, Fan," Jim went on. "I know appearances are against me. I ain't had no love for Abe Mangel. But I didn't do it—"

"Well, you can fix that up—"

"If you'd read the papers like a modern citizen, you'd know better. Mangel knows I didn't do it. Mangel's gone crazy. He's had his own place raided!"

"What!"

"And he's an appointment for tomorrow morning with the District Attorney to peach on the whole damn System."

Fanny was still. She took the paper that Statt handed her. She did not read it.

"He'll go," she murmured.

"He's in earnest."

"He'll go. You've made him into this, Jim. He'll go."

"Unless we stop him."

"You can't."

"Yes we can, Fanny. We can—and we got to-night to do it."

"What do you mean?"

"Abe's coming here tonight . . . to talk to you."

"Yes?"

"He goes out of that door—feet first."

Fanny stood up.

"You mean—you dare to mean—"

Statt stood also. Mildred and Baruch and Wesser sat.

"Now look here, Fanny . . . don't be a damn fool too. Cards on the table. Wesser has the program all arranged. There's no other way for any of us. Too late. The three boys are ready with the guns. Pfennig and Susan are off. They won't be back till the coast is clear. So is the cook. And there ain't any danger. You know the sureness of the House. If it's done here, it's done. And if it's *not* done here,—why it will be, earlier, somewhere else. Almost as safe. But your House goes to Hell. Do you get me? . . . Either here . . . or out you go, the bunch of you."

"Mark?"

Jim Statt smiled. "Have you seen Pfennig? Has he been here of late to see Clara, while she's so sick? I guess not. And you won't see him either. He got wind o' this comin' . . . the wise old owl . . . before it came. He is safe—outside."

“Tessie?”

“She’s gone with Pfennig. It’s been brewing for a long time, ever since Clara sort of dimmed. Everybody was wise, my dear Fanny, except you. You see too many ghosts.”

She saw the House, very real, clattering, crashing—

“You’re threatening me, Jim.”

“Fanny, not if you don’t act foolish. It’s too late, even if we could seal him up. You got the House here with Clara sick in it. Sick as hell. Tessie’s gone. Susan’s ready. It’s the best place to do a necessary job. That’s all, girl! Do you want to get smashed? Right away—turned out—and Clara too, right out of bed?”

Fanny stood calm a moment. Then she sat down.

“Get out of here, Statt,” she said, trying to calm her voice. “Get out of here. Quick!”

“Hold her!” cried Statt. Fanny leaped toward the back. Jack Baruch caught her.

“Jack—let go!”

“She won’t do it. I see that,” said Statt. “She’ll phone to Mangel.”

“Jack—let go!”

“I can’t, Fanny. I’m sorry.”

“Bind her to that chair.”

Statt watched the operation. “Now, bind the chair.” The rope ate tight and inevitable in her flesh.

“My men’ll come at ten . . and pull you . . and release you. Mangel pipes at the same hour. It’ll be at the Dominion Cafe—if you want to

know, dear. And as to you . . don't forget we have your story and you've got a daughter." Fanny for a moment fainted in the burn of horror and shame that flooded her eyes. "Come now," she heard him again as he turned to the others. "Out of this."

They went before him docilely: not daring to look back.

But Statt looked back. He came back.

"You've always been crazy, Fanny Luve," he said. "And now, doin' this . . and for a dirty Jew . . for a Jew you don't give a damn for . . for a Jew you can't save." He looked at her.

She lay strained in her bonds. But her mind was free. And her face, free looking at him, was calm.

Statt came forward a little more.

"Why are you crazy, Fanny Luve?"

He stooped to his knee: he kissed the hand of Fanny. Then he tramped out.

* * *

There was a smile on the face of Mrs. Luve. Her eyes saw happenings far away as if all happenings far away were happenings to smile on.

"For six hours I lay bound. I called and cried for Clara who was in bed upstairs. Just three flights up. She did not hear me. . . . She had heard too many other calls, I guess, since she lay there, to understand that this call was for her." Mrs. Luve smiled. "No bell rang all that time, and I stopped calling. . . .

“It seemed to me though, that I could hear the shot that got old Abe in the heart, as he stepped out into the street through the cafe’s swinging door. . . . Very soon after that, the police. Clara and I were thrown into the street. Clara died in the Hospital of pneumonia. That is all.”

SEVEN

EARTH



ONE of the candles between the woman and the boy had burned faster than the other. It guttered, went out. She saw the death of Clara. . . . The long gray room full of the streaking stains of the white sick. Clara's black hair and the wan sheet and the bars of the iron bed. Clara's clasping arms, moist, shutting out life. —Let me die with you! . . The fading eyes of Clara.

"You forgive me? forgive me? I should not have brought you in, O Fanny. I am glad to pay for that, I was mad! But there were six years. . . . I have loved you. Now, you, what are you going to do?"

"You forgive me, Clara? What becomes of any of us? I have loved you also."

. . . "I murdered her. For what? . . White Clara for a dirty Jew! Mangel is dead at any rate . . . just dead in another place." . . .

"I was not sorry. Clara was dead. My friend! My world was gone. I did not feel sorrow. Walking the streets, the innumerable streets my soul was as upon a journey through numberless bodies and states of myself. Numberless moments. And yet my soul was One. It was unchanged. It moved through the broken sea of my Disaster, it knew it was One. . . .

"It is One now. Here I am . . Four years I have been here. Susan and Tessie I never saw

again. Thelma came back. Dear Thelma. She has helped me. You know how. She saved . . . I can't guess by what means . . . part of my furniture from the crash of the House. She is loyal like an animal. You do well, Samson Brenner, caring even in the way you care, for Thelma. . . .

"Four years I have been here—"

Samson got up. Through the gloom of the heavy room he groped to the sideboard. He found another candle. He brought it back to the table. He lighted it with the other that was low, and set it alongside.

"I have a daughter," she said, "nearly as big as you."

—I want to speak! What can I say to this woman? It is hard, it will be braver to keep silent: not to break this stillness in which her will so strangely works—toward what? For her sake, I am still.

"I am a failure. Look at me, Boy. Look at me. Look at Fanny Dirk. There is light enough to look."

He looked at her. But he saw only her eyes that were very strong and clear.

"You have talked with me long," she said. "Be quiet with me now."

They faced each other over the mellow table. It broadened, it narrowed: they were far and close. There was a wave in the room, making the table and the two flames and their own forms curve and refract, as if their eyes caught this reality of them together through some substance quick like flowing water.

"Be still," she whispered.

The clock gave a stroke: "Half . . past . . eleven."

—He stays!

—He has listened to my words. He has
heard my will.

Carnally he came.

That is swept away.

My will has cleaned him unto me. He stays.

She watched him. Blond warm boy, with eyes
tender and virgin: afraid of the brusque world.
Boy with heart beating a measure beyond the
reach of your eyes!

—Shall I learn now?

What Leon promised? what the dolorous
years

Failed to fulfill?

Shall I learn now from you? . . .

He has stayed and been kind. Soon he will
go away,

Forgetting Thelma. Will you leave me
knowledge?

—O I do not understand . . .

Why I have wanted, why I have wanted . .

Why I have fallen and fallen, looking for God!

You, Boy, won't you go away

And leave me Knowledge? . . .

Her hands were upon the table. His hands were
near her hands upon the table. Their eyes joined.
He rested upon the yearning of her eyes. His
mind was empty.

—Go away. Yes. Before I have lost!

Go, before your staying slays me, Boy.

Go—leave me Knowledge!

He did not stir. His eyes lay within her own as in a womb, resting omnipotent, knowing no act. She held him.

—Go. Reveal to me!

The bell rang.

—Go!

The bell rang.

The bell drove an iron finger between his eyes and her own. His eyes stirred. The bell rang.

—Go! By the will of God, go!

Leave me what my life has bled away

To find at the Bottom . .

The bell rang. His eyes were quickened, for his senses knew not her but that the bell rang.

Fanny got up. He was fixed . . She felt a stirring under her heart.

“Hush, Edith my child,” she murmured, getting up.

Her body was stiff and leaden. But she felt with all her body how his eyes were quickened. Her own eyes turned her about.

Fanny moved with her eyes. His eyes, stirring to life beyond her, were within her womb like a child unborn. . . . “Hush Edith!”

She moved through the tunnelling hall, a shadow darker than it, about eyes that were wells of fire. She had put back the chain upon the door. Groping she loosed it. Thelma burst in. . . .

Thelma Clark was there: exhilarant, laughing, savage.

“O you dear . . waiting all this time for *me*.” She swayed. “In the dark! Waiting, you sillies,

with a candle between you. What's the matter with the gas?"

The room flared bright.

—Give me your eyes. Not to her! Let me hold your eyes.

Thelma flung herself on Samson's lap. She kissed him.

Fanny saw his eyes draw in, swerve to another orbit, flame away. . . . The line of Thelma's thigh lashed in blue silk, the crumple of her little breasts bursting within the lowcut waist . . . there, there.

The eyes of Samson died from the eyes of Fanny.

He stood. He touched Thelma's lips with his hand.

"Come."

They were gone . . .

Fanny heard the door shut. She was alone. She sat down where she had sat before at the table. She arose. She shut out the gas. A peal of Thelma's laughter pierced the door. The room clapped close about the fainting flame of the one candle.

Fanny sat down where she had sat before. Beyond her rigid gaze was an empty place. Beyond the empty place was the Night. Within her gaze was the Night. Her eyes held nothing.

"And a Jew," she murmured "a Jew was to bring me Light."

She faced the Emptiness about her. She met

it. Emptiness? The little candle stilly laid it whole, perfect, before her. Behind her a shut door. About her Emptiness.

“—and God?”

Sudden her eyes were hard. “Think of him,” she spoke. Her mouth full of tears made her voice liquid. “Think of him. Think of him, Fanny. No one else! . . . Your Light-bearer, your Prophet, your Voice in the Wilderness—there he is, out there, in the arms of Thelma . . . Fanny, dare to think.”

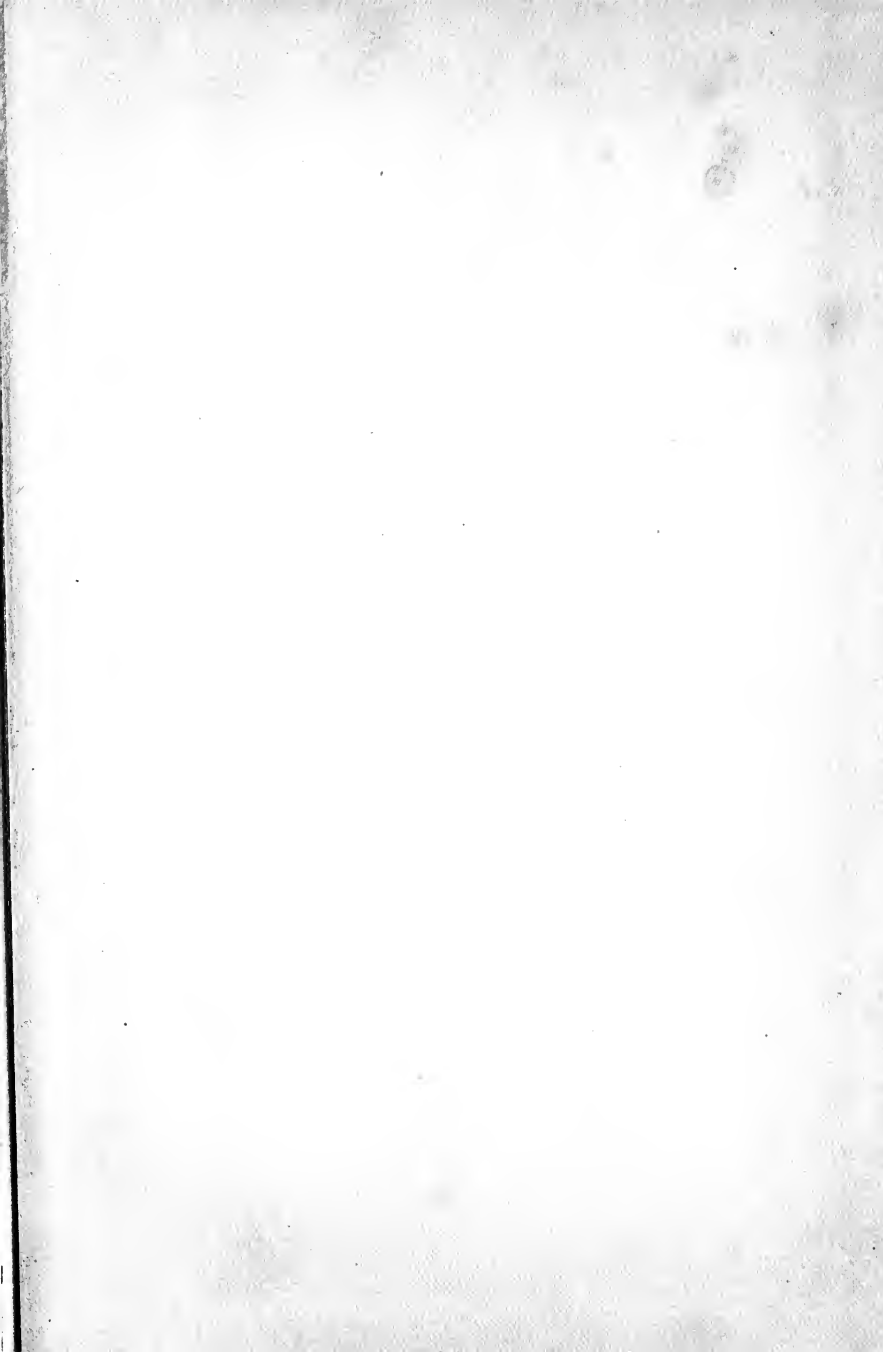
She was still. She was a little woman huddled in the Dark with hard eyes, daring to think.

Daring to see!

Her mouth tremored. Her hands reached open before her. They clasped. She drew her hands in upon her breasts: and as they pressed, her eyes blazed with anguish as if she held flame to her flesh. She pressed . . . she pressed. Her face broke. . . . Then, from the wreckage of her features there was born a smile making them clear and sharp, making them fair and high. A Light shone in them.

1916-1921





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